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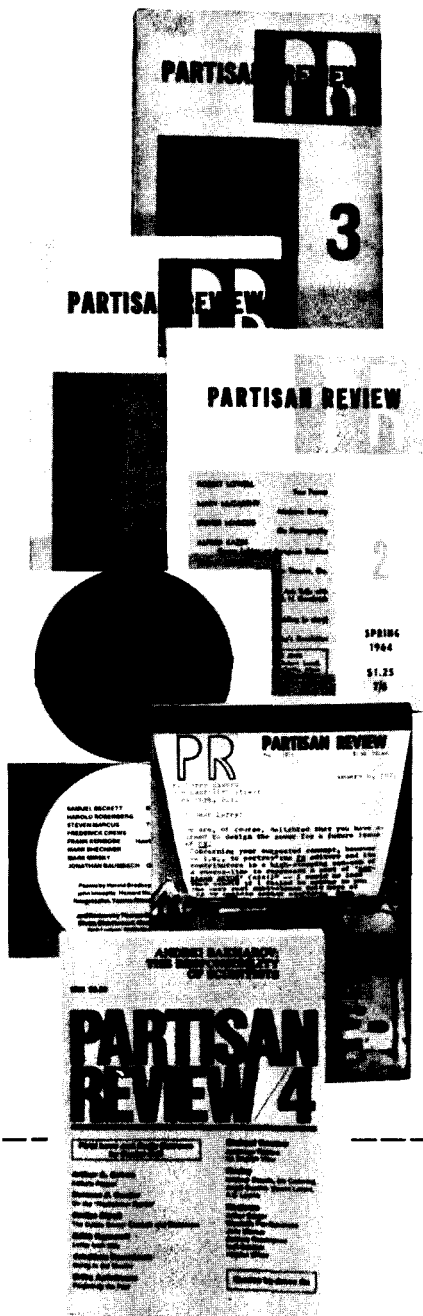
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Correction: The third from the last paragraph in Jonathan Baumbach's movie chronicle in the last issue should read as follows:

The point-of-view character of the first half of the film, Dickinson is replaced by a young prostitute (Nancy Allen) who witnesses the killing. Having seen the murderer, Allen inherits his/her enmity and pursuit, inherits Dickinson's role in the film. Allen's sexuality, like Dickinson's, invites retribution. The implicit connection between the two women—though mostly different, they are also sharers—holds *Dressed to Kill* as narrative together.

The last line of Naomi Lazard's poem in the last issue should read: into the ordinary light.

COMMENT

ANOTHER CONGRESS, ANOTHER TIME. At best, literary congresses are not noted for their intellectual level. They are occasions for travel, for meeting people, and for demonstrating one's loyalties. They are usually promoted to serve some political ends, either open or concealed. I did not attend the recent American Writers Congress in New York. But from what I have heard and read, it seems to have been a wild and discordant bash, whose only unifying principle was to regroup the forces of the left that had been diffused after the sixties and to combat what they see as the menace of reaction in this country.

Perhaps one way to judge a Congress is by the nature and size of the opposition. I gather, as Morris Dickstein indicates in his comment in this issue, that there was little or no articulate opposition at this Congress, and this led me to recall the Second American Writers Congress in 1937, which I attended briefly as a member of a small and endangered minority.

Those familiar with the politics of the thirties will remember that this Congress, like the First American Writers Congress, was controlled by the Communist Party. But unlike the first one, which danced to the tune of the "revolutionary" line of the party, this one had to adapt to the new People's Front policy. This meant that while the party was still to be in command, the revolution had to be played down. For the Congress had to appear to be a coalition of "progressive" writers upholding American "democratic traditions." This was to be accomplished not only by a doctrinal shift, but a change in the cast of characters. Hence some of the leading figures had to be non-communists or people not known to be communists. But to ensure a tight control by the party, these writers had to be sympathetic and had to be trusted not to criticize the Soviet Union. In the thirties, this was not too difficult, as a large section of intellectual opinion was swayed by the myth of the Soviet Union as the vanguard of historic progress. Among the prominent figures who had been lured into the Congress were Ernest Hemingway and Archibald MacLeish, along

with other writers such as Malcolm Cowley and Kenneth Burke who had been fellow travellers. Waldo Frank, who was not considered trustworthy enough, was deposed as president, and the Congress elected as its new president Donald Ogden Stewart, who was more pliable, and was not associated in the public mind with the old guard communists or fellow travellers.

The party regulars were there in full force, and they could have elected Stalin as president, if they were told to. Who were the opposition? A tiny band of political Don Quixotes, made up of Mary McCarthy, Dwight Macdonald, Eleanor Clark, Philip Rahv, and myself. Rahv and I had broken with the communists and had joined with McCarthy, Macdonald, F.W. Dupee, and George Morris to put out the new *Partisan Review*. Rahv and I were the most politically experienced in the group and knew most about Marxist doctrine and communist practice. (There were some who had broken earlier but they were mostly not literary.) In any event, the others felt we should attend the Writers Congress and voice our opposition. Rahv and I said it was useless: we would be talking to the walls. But the others insisted. We felt they did not understand that communists used any means to crush their critics, particularly those from the left. But they were excited by the prospect of challenging the communists on their own grounds. They were clearly bolder than Rahv and myself, less concerned about the consequences, and I suppose we were shamed into going along.

Need I say it was a fiasco? Mary was a marvelous speaker, gracious but firm, Eleanor combined conviction and sensibility, Dwight immediately impressed one as a man of integrity, who had no patience with doubletalk. They would have roused any free gathering. But they were put down with great bravado by the party stalwarts, those veterans of endless sophistical polemics and rationalizations and lies, who could say anything they pleased because they knew that they had everybody on their side except us. Rahv and I, who had some knowledge of communist tactics and methods of debate, tried to undercut their dismissal of our criticism. But we did not have our heart in it. And after a short exchange between our pistols and their artillery, we walked out. The *New Masses* described our opposition thus: "Several Trotskyites present who did not participate in the creative discussions attacked the Soviet Union and the People's Front in Spain. Their conduct in an atmosphere of full and free discussion convinced the doubtful that Trotskyism is sterile, destructive, and reactionary." Those who have

followed communist modes of argument know, of course, that Trotskyite is the label they use for any criticism from a liberal or left position.

If I give the impression that I am complaining about what happened, I should correct it. On the contrary, anyone who has not seen the communists up close, I am convinced, has had an incomplete political education. It is a requisite for understanding much of what goes on in the world today. It certainly helps one to understand the Soviet mind. And it enables one to grasp how people are trapped by movements and ideologies, and why so many persons of good will, who believe in justice and in democracy, fall for radical postures that have nothing to do with either. The communist experience might also provide some insight into the kind of political self-hypnosis that may lead ultimately to left-wing terrorism.

W.P.

ONE YEAR AFTER THE RESTORATION. After nearly half a century, the Republicans have finally elected a president who offered “a choice not an echo” in repudiating the “me-tooism” of the party’s past candidates from its centrist wing. Identifying himself with FDR as a determined advocate of change, Reagan has succeeded in his first eight months in office in enacting a negative version of the New Deal by sharply reducing, without serious opposition from the Democrats in Congress, both taxes and federal spending on social programs. But the hour is clearly too late for a real counter-revolution reversing the enormous increase in the powers of the federal government that began in the 1930s, just as the creation of the welfare state and several decades of sustained economic growth eliminated some time ago the possibility of a “transition to socialism” led by the working class in the democratic capitalist societies of the West. Perhaps if Taft rather than Eisenhower had been elected in 1952, or even if Nixon had not been laid low by Watergate after his landslide 1972 victory, it might still have been possible to restore—at least temporarily—an unregulated capitalism and a balanced federal budget. But such things were not to be: the capture of the White House by old believers has at last taken place in an unpropitious time of stagfla-

tion, lagging productivity, high energy costs, stiff foreign competition against the products of American industry, and foreign policy reverses ending détente with the Soviet Union. Now it is the turn of faithful conservatives to learn that history “gives when our attention is distracted . . . Gives too late what’s not believed in, or if still believed, in memory only, reconsidered passion.”

Virtually every competent economist has observed, including *sotto voce* at least a few associated with the Reagan administration, that the tax cuts favored by the supply-siders, monetarist anti-inflation strategies, increased military spending, and the old fetish of balancing the budget work at cross-purposes with one another. Reagan so far has been fairly lucky with inflation, prices having risen more slowly because of the temporary oil glut. But high interest rates have thrown the economy into a deepening recession marked by rising unemployment that increases the political vulnerability of the Republicans a year before congressional elections. The belief that the tax cuts will stimulate production is no more than a pious hope, obviously not shared by Wall Street. The supply-side argument about the effects of marginal tax rates is patently a dreamed-up, pseudo-scientific piece of political rationalization taken seriously only by a few amateur enthusiasts like George Gilder. Monetarism, on the other hand, is a serious, if largely unproven, macro-economic theory. The trouble is that the practice inferred from the theory is politically insupportable in a democratic society that experienced the Great Depression. Can the United States, a less cohesive country subject to more frequent elections, put up with rates of unemployment equalling or surpassing those already attained in Margaret Thatcher’s Britain?

But the failures of the Reagan administration and the utopian character of its anti-statist ideology have not been countered by renewed intellectual vigor and political creativity on the part of the Democrats and the left. An indication of their disarray is the fatuous harping, still heard over a year after the election, on Reagan’s alleged lack of a “mandate” to enact his economic program. One hears this not only from predictable left-liberal partisans in the media but from professional Democratic politicians who might be expected to know better, especially when they address intraparty affairs, such as last October’s conference in Baltimore. Reagan, after all, has only carried out what he plainly said was his intention during the campaign, and it seems improbable that many voters expected him to redistribute wealth and power in any direction other

than upwards and towards the private sector. Enough of them felt pinched by inflation and sluggish growth to offer him the opportunity to try to turn the economy around even if it meant trimming the welfare state. Roosevelt, by contrast, in the much worse economic crisis of 1932 was elected by roughly the same proportion as Reagan (of a smaller electorate), and he notoriously failed to propose any of the reforms that later came to be known as the New Deal. The complaints about Reagan's lack of a mandate are bad political science, at best a form of pardonable wish-fulfillment, at worst mere *kvetching*.

The Democrats may make political gains in 1982 and even recapture the presidency two years later—the notion that 1980 was a “realigning” election has no foundation. But they are not likely to revive the economy and thereby overcome the decade-long political stalemate between the parties if they fail to transcend their own brand of special-interest politics. Pledges to restore the Reagan budget cuts in an effort to revitalize the old New Deal coalition of assorted underdogs will scarcely suffice. The very welfare state programs initiated by past Democratic administrations have reduced the size of the voting groups to which the Democratic party has traditionally appealed, and population shifts have eroded its regional base. More important, the problems of the economy are located in the sphere of production—on this the supply-siders are right—rather than of distribution at the same time that Keynesian demand-management has foundered on the reefs of inflation. Nor is the strident rhetoric emanating from the left about the menace of the New Right and the imminence of a new McCarthyism, led by a few antediluvian Republican senators from the South, capable of forging a formidable electoral alliance. A certain kind of leftist almost instinctively responds to political defeat by proclaiming that “fascism” is on the march and requires a popular front with yesterday's liberal enemies in order to oppose it. Usually, this is a calculated political strategy rather than a genuine fear. It is unlikely to work at the present time: the recent outburst against the New Right by Barry Goldwater, of all people, suggests that the “social conservatives” are becoming an embarrassment to the Republicans themselves.

The Democrats' best opportunity lies in taking advantage of the incurable anti-statism of the Reagan administration to propose a national plan for economic revival. Such a plan should include an incomes and prices policy, the allocation of energy resources, a program such as Felix Rohatyn's for creating a new Reconstruction

Finance Corporation to rebuild American heavy industry, and a new military outlook along the lines of James Fallows' recent book that would shift emphasis from high-cost technology to more reliable, simpler weapons and the upgrading of manpower. Such proposals are certain to alienate segments of the left which dislike the "corporatist" implications of Rohatyn's scheme and prefer to slash defense spending across the board rather than to allocate it more effectively. Yet if the Rohatyn plan were to be politicized through its adoption by leading Democrats, it would provide ample scope for the injection of "left" content, such as the appointment of union leaders to corporate boards (as Douglas Fraser now sits on the Chrysler board). The Reagan approach to defense grossly overvalues the sheer accumulation of complex and expensive weaponry, but the need for a foreign policy backed up by military strength is not going to abate. More generally, this is a good time to abandon the habit of thinking of politics solely in relation to a one-dimensional left-right continuum. Such a view necessarily defines any new proposal as movement in only one of two possible directions and thus mobilizes passions attached to symbols against change of any kind. Resistance to new ideas is not a monopoly of conservatives.

D.W.

THUNDER ON THE LEFT. In the middle of October, two momentous though unrelated events took place which may have long-range consequences for the American left. On Columbus Day weekend more than three thousand people jammed the Roosevelt Hotel in New York for the first American Writers Congress since the days of the Popular Front. Ten days later several members of the Weather Underground and the Black Liberation Army were seized after a bloody armed robbery in Nanuet, New York, which left three men dead and many in the radicals' own student generation in a state of shock and revulsion.

Neither event should be discussed in strictly political terms. The Writers Congress, the brainchild of Victor Navasky and his colleagues at *The Nation*, was cosponsored, at least in name, by a

wide variety of writers' organizations and periodicals, including *PR*. Its concerns were divided between bread-and-butter issues affecting writers and more political problems exacerbated by the Reagan administration and the new conservative thrust across the country. As for the robbery and murders, as of this writing no political rationale whatever has been suggested, except for the crude logic of guerrilla warfare and violent confrontation to which these marginal groups, which had seemed dormant and decimated, had long been committed.

But politics involves symbolism along with programs and positions. Part of the success of the early months of the Mitterand presidency in France came from his adroit appeal to the venerable symbolism of the European Socialist tradition and the French left, with its martyrs like Jean Jaurès and Jean Moulin and its watershed moments like the Popular Front victory of 1936. The Brinks robbery was a reminder of a period which many on the left would prefer to forget—the disintegration of the student movement into random violence and destructive rage at the end of the sixties. “The bloody shootout walks into our consciousness like a ghost,” Paul Berman wrote in the *Village Voice*. “These bandits are the Miss Havishams of the left, living in the past to the point of madness.” In the same issue Alexander Cockburn, trying even harder to distance the Weatherpeople from the legitimate left, compared them to the Japanese soldiers still fighting World War II on some remote Pacific Island. Except that those model warriors were not killing anyone, merely waiting for new orders from their emperor.

The symbolism of the Writers Congress proved far less interesting to the mass media, though it was fraught with meaning for those who knew the history of American radicalism. In its meagre coverage, the *Times* gave almost as much space to the preemptive salvos of Midge Decter, that tenacious watchdog of the left, as to this extraordinary meeting of three thousand American writers gathered together for the first time in forty years. Like Midge Decter, the organizers of the Congress were well aware that the congresses of the thirties were manipulated by the communists, that they had, as Navasky put it, a “covert political agenda.” But a line of continuity was established nonetheless in a keynote address by Meridel LeSueur, an 81-year-old writer who began by recalling the first Congress of 1935 and ended—in a progressive dithyramb to the American heartland—by embodying it. Miss LeSueur, who has labored and languished in obscurity since the thirties, obviously had

a knotty integrity of her own. But too many other Congress speakers dampened the enthusiasm of their youngish audiences with a rhetoric as stale as the revolutionary jargon of urban guerrillas. Only an eloquent keynote speech by Toni Morrison rescued the eagerly attended opening session, from which a thousand people had to be turned away. Here at last was a real *writer*, someone with a finely sensual feeling for words.

The favored rhetoric at the Congress was not really Marxist; it was a rhetoric of crisis, less historical than hysterical. Yet the Reagan policies on first amendment rights, on the domestic role of the CIA and FBI, on the Freedom of Information Act, on Latin America, on the regulatory agencies, on the environment, on taxes, on social programs, on affirmative action, on military spending, and on nuclear weapons lent plausibility to apocalyptic statements that would have seemed grossly exaggerated a year earlier. The political energy of the Congress came less from a resurgent left than from a left up against the wall, angry, frustrated, fighting battles that seemed won thirty years ago. Yet the gathering also demonstrated what a large reservoir of impassioned liberal and radical sentiment survives from the sixties—though, like the Congress itself, it remains below the threshold of media attention. The stingy press coverage only proved what Toni Morrison and others had repeatedly asserted, that as writers the participants were marginal to the life of the country. “We are toys,” said Morrison, “things to be played with by little kings who love us while we please, dismiss us when we don’t.”

The contrast with the sensational coverage of the Brinks holdup was instructive. Without a trace of political theater, with nothing to attract the camera eye but words and more words, the Writers Congress was more Old Left than New, more interested in mobilizing its participants than in manipulating the media. Yesterday’s radical celebrities like Abbie Hoffman passed through the halls of the Congress almost unnoticed. Instead speakers strained, sometimes persuasively, to link the worsening lot of writers with social and economic trends in the nation, especially the concentration of power in the hands of fewer and fewer large corporations.

The most damning testimony against the publishing industry came from those inside it, like Faith Sale, an editor at Putnam’s, who eschewed ideological rhetoric but itemized the baleful impact of conglomerates, of large-scale bookstore chains monopolizing distribution, of huge advances to a few books and bottom-line pressures

on all the rest. At the end of the Congress an overwhelming majority voted to support the formation of a writers' union. The Congress also took a stand on many political issues, only a few of them — book-burning, censorship, the first amendment — directly impinging on writers as writers. It left unsettled the question of how those who had been reduced to cogs of the culture industry or dispensable toys would go about saving the world. There was something infectious about the sentiment of solidarity that seized many incorrigible individualists in the course of the proceedings. But it's hard to visualize how these elevating impulses will be translated into action.

Action was what the cohorts of the Weather Underground were presumably committed to, but did any still have the illusion that *their hit-and-run tactics, their paltry numbers, and their wanton brutality* still contributed to saving the world, or to any other unselfish goal? Whatever the attempts of organizers to mobilize the Congress towards prepared positions, whatever the woolly, politicized language of some of the panelists, the Writers Congress — with a thousand fringe groups clammering for attention — was as open and disorganized as the cadres of crazed militants were clannish and conspiratorial. Instead of advancing the cause of justice and human dignity, the Brinks murderers have only swollen the arsenal of the right. The spectre of a terrorist network will long outlive the network itself.

As always, writers in America are in an isolated position. Insofar as they aim to defend their own interests they are on solid ground. But writers are no more unified on political issues than most professionals; as an organized pressure group they are likely to remain where they began: on the fringe. But that's no reason for them to stop trying.

M.D.

Amos Oz

CONTEMPORARY HEBREW LITERATURE

I have second thoughts about the word “contemporary,” which baffles me. Perhaps I should tell the story of modern Hebrew literature, rather than pretend to sum it up and to squeeze it into definitions and formulae: I am a storyteller, not a scholar. Now, stories are never “contemporary”; not even if they are set in the present time, not even when they are told in the present tense. A story is bound, almost by definition, to relate to the past. Storytellers are cripples, monsters really, born with their necks and faces turned backwards.

Of course, we all know of poets and storytellers who have had amazing revelations about the future, verging sometimes on the prophetic, writers who foresaw way ahead of ideologists and politicians (not that I regard being ahead of ideologists and politicians such a big deal). But even those who had this “infrared” capacity for piercing the darkness of the future and for reading fortunes in advance, like Dostoyevsky or Kafka, even they were monsters with turned-back necks and faces. It was only through some mysterious looking glass which they have found somewhere in the past, that they were able to peep into some of what was yet to come.

But just how far into the past do I go? Where does my story proper begin?

The easiest thing to do is just to discuss a number of significant recent Hebrew books, and then perhaps give some plot summaries. And then put it all in a familiar context: call this and that “expressionist,” “existentialist,” “political,” and so on. I might be expected to say who exactly is Israel’s Saul Bellow, who is Garcia Marquez, who resembles Günter Grass, who are the Pounds, the Eliots, or the Solzhenitsyns in our little Israeli village. I admit that this is a tempting way. It could be fun. In fact, I sometimes tend to amuse people who are just faintly familiar with Israel’s literary scene by telling them that this scene is much like that of a continuing earthquake, with various geological stratas exposed to be watched simultaneously: if you hit the right café in Tel Aviv at the right time

of the day you could see—until a few years ago—the John Donne of Hebrew poetry and the Lord Byron of Hebrew poetry, and the Walt Whitman and the T.S. Eliot sitting together by the same table with the local Allen Ginsberg, all of them alive (and kicking hard), all of them on speaking terms or rather on screaming terms with each other. It is a result of the fact that literary developments which occurred in English and in other European literary traditions over centuries took place within decades in Hebrew.

Modern Hebrew has several things in common with Elizabethan English: our language is still like melting lava, an erupting volcano; it's bubbling still with steam and with fumes and with fury. A poet or a writer of modern Hebrew is still in a position to "legislate" within the language to force or to seduce the language into "having it his way." I dare say that, by comparison, modern English is a respectable elderly lady with whom you do not dare to take liberties so easily (admittedly Faulkner and Joyce and some other mad Irishmen did just that to English, and did it all the way).

But Hebrew nevertheless seems to encourage such practices. She still is a lady of easy virtue.

Incidentally, by comparing modern Hebrew to Elizabethan English I'm not suggesting, of course, that each and every contemporary Hebrew writer is a William Shakespeare (of those we only have about half a dozen).

But I'm making the wrong point altogether—the easier one. Because the truth is that despite some striking similarities, and despite strong influences from East and West European literatures, the basic context of Hebrew literature has always been Hebrew, and Jewish, and recently, Zionist. Which makes my task much harder than it could have been if I thought that the context is basically European. As I said, modern Hebrew literature happens to be in my view much more than just an extension, a replica, or a "province" of other literatures with which one may be more familiar.

Perhaps I could start with the madmen; talk about the desperados—those Hebrew poets and writers who emerged from the ghettos of Eastern Europe at the turn of the century: Mendele and Berdichevsky, Bialik and Brenner and Gnessin—figures of "The Great Generation." I refer to them as madmen and desperados because they were writing in Hebrew for a hardly existing audience, with hardly any hopes for future generations of readers. For many years they wrote in Hebrew to be read mainly by their fellow Hebrew writers and by very few others. Some of them died without

ever dreaming that their works would be taught in schools, that streets and kibbutzim would be named after them, and that they would even get as far as having their names remembered.

In fact, at least some of them felt that they were the very end of Hebrew. They regarded themselves—at least some of them did—as authors of a tragic epilogue for an ancient drama which opened millennia earlier and was now, as they saw it, dying in the gutters.

So why didn't they simply quit? They were, after all, excellent writers. All of them could easily write in Yiddish, which at the time was still the language of millions and which, incidentally, was the native tongue of them all. Some of them could have gone very far in this world by switching to Russian, or German, with which they were at home. Who, at the turn of the century, really cared to read Hebrew? Whom did they have in mind?

I have to admit that to me it is still a mystery.

Actually, rather than solve it, I'm going to further complicate it. Bialik and Brenner and Berdichevsky and the others knew only too well that there are millions of Jews in the world who could read Hebrew but would only read it in their holy books and not—Heaven forbid, perish the thought—in secular books. While at the same time there were already more and more Jews ready and eager to read stories and poems, but who would rather read them in Russian or German or Polish. So for whom did those members of the Great Generation write their Hebrew, whom did they have in mind?

All this is extremely relevant to our subject, as I happen to believe that at least a touch of the very same madness and of the very same despair is still there in every significant contemporary Hebrew work. Just as it is still secretly feeding the true Zionism (not the distorted one, though: I refer to despair and madness as opposed to insanity and fanaticism).

So we begin with Smolenskin perhaps, or with Mendele, who struggled to compose mimetic Hebrew prose *à la* Charles Dickens or *à la* Balzac and Victor Hugo, many years before any man in the world had ever said to a woman "I love you" in Hebrew? (By the way, our problems in writing mimetic Hebrew prose nowadays are not as far from theirs as one might have thought.)

Or do I start with Bialik, who loved and who hated and demolished and who at the same time preserved and reconstructed *in his Hebrew verse* a Jewish world which in his days was still alive (in Yiddish) and still creative and vivacious (in Yiddish) and still blossoming (in Yiddish) with its last pulses of vigor? Why did Bialik, and

how could he, along with all the others, try to preserve this Yiddish world in Hebrew? Oh, those sons and lovers and killers and undertakers and monument builders and museum-keepers of the great shadow-state of the Jews in Eastern Europe — why and how did they do all this in Hebrew rather than in Yiddish? Or, for that matter, in Russian or German or Polish? After all, those writers, as well as their heroes, used to laugh and weep and talk and dream and make love in languages other than Hebrew, which at the time was almost as dead as ancient Greek or Latin. Still, they made their Yiddish or Russian-speaking characters talk and curse and weep and even make love in Hebrew. Why on earth did they do it?

I have my guess: there must have been some deep sense of despair beyond all this. And a terrible sense of doom. Maybe they sensed somehow that all was lost anyway, that soon there would be no more Jews, no more Yiddish or Hebrew; maybe something in them wanted to close the circle with a biblical passion and anger for which the Yiddish language was just too soft and cozy, whereas Russian or German — improper. Like the homecoming of a dying man. At least of Bialik, Berdichevsky, and Brenner I daresay that sometimes they wrote not for the living, not for any future generation, but precisely for the ancient dead. Or was there, after all, some secret hope beyond hope? I do not know. All I know is that all of us write or talk to the dead in moments of despair.

Maybe the story begins right in Number 48, Mile End Road, Whitechapel, London, in the year 1906, with twenty-six-year-old Yossef Hayim Brenner who lived there, a wretched Jewish refugee from Russia, and was putting together no less than a fresh and modern Hebrew literary magazine. Which he printed with his own hands and bound and carried in a sack on his back to the post office to be mailed to his 212 subscribers, scattered in eight or nine countries (hardly half a dozen of them in London itself), just a bunch of lunatics who had not abandoned Hebrew.

Not that Brenner had much faith in what he was doing. On the contrary; just like his wistful characters, Brenner felt that it was all over and doomed: Zionism and Hebrew, as well as the world of Jewish Eastern Europe. Many of his characters, Tolstoyans who stepped right out of a Dostoyevsky novel, were desperate people who maintained that the Jewish people were dying of an incurable, malignant, inherited disease. Nevertheless something ought to be done in the way of trying to survive and even recover, no matter how pathetic and useless this “something” may be.

Brenner made his characters speak Hebrew; he made them pronounce in it thoughts that were, if anything, existentialist before existentialism (probably without his knowing the very term *existentialism*).

His stories suggest that all of us are left alone in the world and that it's up to us to struggle against odds, that we are bound to lose the battle and yet we ought to fight it. Brenner made his lone heroes say all this in Hebrew, perhaps as a kind of a metaphysical protest. Hebrew was, after all, the language of the nonexistent God; so that complaint which God would never listen to, let Him not hear it in Hebrew. Brenner, it has been pointed out many times, hated Jews. One Jew he hated in particular—himself. He called his collection of miserable characters, those dropouts, those self-educated little refugees from Eastern Europe, youths without guts or purpose—he called them “dead souls” (there are, however, a few exceptions in his stories). But most of them, including pioneers in Palestine, he described as “living ghosts.” Puritans, who are endlessly talking of sensual liberation; intellectuals chatting day and night about manual work and about “going back to the land”; little politicians using big words; eternal wanderers, uprooted forever, exchanging views on “roots”; atheists, sweating with guilt and shame whenever they dare to dream about the shadow of a woman. World reformers who cannot even tie their own shoelaces. Oh, he hated their guts. Yet let me tell you something: with an enemy like Brenner, who needs friends? Brenner's *Breakdown and Bereavement* is available in English translation; read it and see for yourselves the desperate compassion he had after all for his characters, of whom he sometimes wrote like the worst of all anti-Semites. He made them look sick and phony and pompous, or at best pathetic and hopeless. That's what Brenner did, and that is what many other members of the Great Generation of modern Hebrew literature did, if not as vehemently. And this is the real context of even the most contemporary Hebrew literature: the soul-searching, the self-hatred, mingled with compassion, the wrath, the ironies, and a certain sense of “unrealness” about the people, the time, the place, and the language.

What actually happened when Brenner's own characters, his own models from real life, read his stories? Something happened which, I believe, is almost unique in the history of world literature: once the characters had read about themselves in the stories by Brenner and his fellow writers, they were deeply hurt, insulted, humiliated, and shocked; in fact they grew very angry; not with

Brenner — after all, they had been through Dostoyevsky before — no, they grew angry with themselves and with the entire air of decline and decomposition of Diaspora Jewish life, traditional and “modernized” alike. So Bialik and Berdichevsky and Brenner and the others, without really meaning to, had started the fire and the zeal of those few hundreds, and eventually thousands, of “desperados” who created the foundations for Israel. Our grandparents. In a strange, paradoxical way they burned with desire to show Brenner just how wrong he was. So they stepped right out of his stories and indeed right out of their own skin just to show him that they were not at all what they really were. I realize that this may sound like some third-rate detective story with characters suddenly leaping out of the pages to demolish their author—but that’s how it worked: a literature which was finally meant to commemorate a dying world ignited a revolution beyond its authors’ widest hopes. So eventually Brenner’s own characters made his stories sound wrong and cruel and hateful and short-sighted; his heroes became his refuters, which is exactly what he might have wished in his heart of hearts.

Now what has this to do with present-day Israeli literature? When, if ever, am I going to get to the point and talk about Zach, Amihai, Pagis, Dahlia Rabikovitch? And what about Appelfeld and Yehoshua and Amalia Cahana-Carmon and their more recent successors?

Apparently, what is happening in the free state of Israel belongs to a brand-new story, in literature and otherwise. Apparently, gone are the days of a ghost language used by desperate writers to mourn a dying world. Can’t we just let the dead bury the dead and go about our own business? Indeed, such a mood prevailed over the so-called Sabra Literature for about one decade, just before and just after independence was achieved. Books seemed to convey a lot of heroism and to celebrate the Gentile-Jew type. There was a combination of glee and macho, perhaps a touch of Hemingway at his worst, and a touch of enthusiastic, Soviet-inspired, Social Realism. But let me stress that even for those euphoric years my description is unfair to some major writers and poets like Yizhar, Amir Gilboa, and Haim Gury (Gouri) in his better poems. In fact my description refers just to the general, widespread literary mood in those years. The pulses of dread and of guilt, of unreality and of neurosis, had never disappeared completely from the literary scene.

Since the sixties, roughly, one can decipher a significant comeback of themes and tunes and melodies and even techniques which

used to be identified with the Great Generation. It is the basic Hebrew context which reappears in the last two decades: the persistent fear of approaching disaster; time and place which suddenly feel unreal; longings for faraway places; scepticism, irony, and even self-hatred; political siege transfigured into emotional siege; and ultimately the effort, which used to be so typical of the Great Generation, to seize within a fluid language a fluid, transitive reality.

If there is any common denominator for writers as different from each other as, say, Amihai and Amalia Cahana-Carmon, it is the following: the language strains itself to deal with a gushing river of an unsettled reality. It is the widespread feeling in today's Israeli literature that whatever looks real and permanent today was not there yesterday and might be gone tomorrow; or else, that tonight's dreams, nightmares, or horrid memories might become real life the next morning.

The Israeli readers do not really enjoy their literature. They read it as if obsessed; they often say that present-day writers and poets are dangerous to the national morale and damaging Israel's self-image and its reputation in the outside world. So, it may be that one day we, too, are going to irritate our readers to the point of their throwing away our books and cursing us and doing something far-reaching and angry about the troubles, old and new.

If and when this happens, it will turn contemporary Israeli literature, even though post eventum, into a political literature in the broadest sense of the word. Our readers may then become our refuters. If and when this happens we may deserve to share the same bookshelf with Brenner and other members of the Great Generation.

And finally: you must have seen for yourselves that the story of modern Hebrew contains despair and longing, incredible obstinacy along with tremendous will for life. Indeed, it is a story full of sound and fury. Maybe it takes an idiot to try and squeeze some of it into a short account like this.

Ronald Christ

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSE DONOSO

Ronald Christ: Is it true that the first things you wrote were short stories in English when you were very young?

José Donoso: I wasn't that young. I was twenty-five and I was at Princeton. I'd seen a bit of the world but I had never really gotten down to writing anything. As a child I had written, but not seriously; I'd written bits and pieces. I always knew that I was going to be a writer, and I told everybody that I was in fact a writer — without having written anything. I read voraciously. I kept voluminous diaries. I did all sorts of things, especially with a view to becoming a writer, but I had never actually finished anything. I think the change came about because I knew that here in Princeton those short stories were really going to be published. We had invented a little magazine called *mss*. It was the *avant-garde* counterpart of the *Nassau Lit* and we sort of snubbed the *Nassau Lit* as being too conservative. We had decided to publish our little magazine and we went around gathering money for it and finally we did get a few hundred dollars together and we did publish it. But knowing that there was a magazine ready to publish my things made me want to write and to publish. So my debut was in English . . . except for small, let's say, articles before that in some magazines. Very run-of-the-mill journalism.

Christ: Were those stories like your works that we know now?

Donoso: One of them is quite a lot like the works you know. It's called "Poisoned Pastries." The center of it is a small boy, the family, the old house, the relation to the sister, the appearance of the mythical old woman — of *the* mythical old woman belonging to another class which appears in all my work. She makes her appearance in this absolutely first short story.

Christ: You speak of these elements as if they're part of a familiar inventory.

Donoso: This is something I've been able to see afterwards, from the vantage point of today. There are certain elements in my work that have been repeated. In other words, I've wanted to repeat

them. But simply because they are what I have been able to grasp and use. In and of themselves, they're not important to me. But they're charged with possibility, like a battery: in itself a battery is inactive, but if you connect it with certain other things, it becomes active.

Christ: Is their activating quality, rather than their implication, what has led you to say that there's no social message in what you write?

Donoso: I didn't say that there was no social message. I'm just very angry when people harp on it as the beginning and end of everything. It's the first thing they see and they never go beyond it. It's okay if they see it, but if they see it as part of something. The people I'm angry at are ones who only see that, as I would tend to be angry—but not so much—at the people who only see structure.

Christ: The Latin American critics have tended mainly to see the social implications.

Donoso: Sure. Predictably.

Christ: How do you think you've fared with North American critics?

Donoso: A little hard, because the critics have not really been critics but reviewers, which is something different. I haven't had any criticism, per se, in America.

Christ: As a little critical background, then, what British and American writers have had an influence on you?

Donoso: I suppose Faulkner at one point sort of turned all hell loose in me. In Latin America we were writing a very flat, realistic prose. And here came Faulkner, with his huge power of doing strange things with a sentence and not minding about tacking ten adjectives onto a noun.

Christ: As your own work develops, your own sentences tend to get longer and more convoluted, but the diction stays simple.

Donoso: You see, what happens in most of my work is that the structure is complicated or complex but the things out of which that structure is made are not complicated. The elements are not complicated even though the structure itself is complicated. You can say the same thing about my sentences: the sentence itself may be complicated but the words with which I've made that sentence complicated, in themselves, are fairly simple.

Christ: They tend to be loose, cumulative sentences, so there's no problem of deciphering or decoding. Not like Proust's sentences.

Donoso: Oh, no, no, no, not at all. Not like Henry James's sentences either.

Christ: But James has influenced you. How did that come about?

Donoso: It came about at Princeton. I had never heard of Henry James before I went to Princeton. That is, I had heard of him, but he was just there, without any real importance. My first involvement with James was a course given by Lawrence Thompson at Princeton. We read—what was it?—twelve novels and one was *The Ambassadors*. I read it and I was absolutely amazed by the possibilities. If I'm honest about it today, however, the real *unconscious* influence is that of Dickens and not James. Dickens is always at the back of my mind. Somehow the misery and filth and decay of Victorian London seem a more pertinent comment on Latin American filth and decay than comments written today: things are that basic, that savage down there, and misery and pictures of it seem to be the natural thing to do, the place where one should begin. Not by choice, or at least not by conscious choice. Even if one belongs to the middle class, and writes about oneself and one's world, one cannot stay away from trash, garbage, refuse. Refuse is important, as it was in Victorian England and means many things, as do decay and misery and poverty. The conditions in our land today are pretty Victorian from many points of view and trash being bundled up and cared for is a comment on that, I guess: fear, psychologically and socially speaking, bundling up refuse is the fear of *being* refuse. But when I read James's *The Ambassadors* I found that there was the world and the elements of Dickens transformed into something which is completely different, a complete structure and order, a beautiful thing, a beautiful object where the intelligence is of paramount importance.

Christ: Your early work shows the Jamesian element more than *The Obscene Bird of Night*, which seems more Dickensian. Andrés in *Coronation*, for example, is a man like Strether in *The Ambassadors*.

Donoso: Sure. Quite a bit.

Christ: Was Andrés understood in Chile?

Donoso: No-o. Nobody's ever read James in Chile. They described Andrés as decadent, showing the ills of decadence in our society. But they didn't understand him in his origin and in his tradition.

Christ: How about other writers such as Sterne and Virginia Woolf? Sterne seems to have had a largely unacknowledged influence on Latin American novelists.

Donoso: Probably not directly, but as he influenced Virginia Woolf, say, and Joyce (though I can't see him as an influence on me). I

certainly read Sterne when I was very young, and reread him again in college, and then again when reading *The Common Reader*. But I wonder if what you call the “influence of Sterne on Latin American novelists” is not the other way around: the influence of Spanish novels of the Golden Age on the English novelists of the eighteenth century (and, vividly, on Latin American writing of today) makes your proposition material for the nice paradox of proposing, really, an influence of the Latin Americans on, at least, the readers of Sterne. Seriously, though, both Sterne and we share an influence, although I don’t think a direct one. As for Virginia Woolf, yes. Tremendously. The mother of us all, in so many ways. How avidly I read her! I tried to write my senior thesis on her as an undergraduate at Princeton, in 1951. I was not allowed to because she was too recent and there was not “enough orthodox criticism on her work” for me to do anything of academic value.

Christ: How did it come about that you were so much more open to foreign influences?

Donoso: One of the important things, I think, in my case—I can’t speak for others—I don’t generalize and theorize because I always feel that I’m doing an injustice. In my own case, then, it was a feeling of a lack of having one’s own culture. There was no great feeling of tradition, or at least of the possibility of relating to a tradition or placing myself within a tradition, which was my own in Chile. In my case it was definitely a feeling that my world, my class, my country did not give me enough from which I could learn and which could feed me the things that I was interested in.

Christ: So it wasn’t a question of affection or exoticism but of undernourishment, which fits into the stereotypical notion of underdevelopment.

Donoso: I would say so, yes. Then of course there was the very obvious fact that we all learned languages very young. I learned English when I was five or six at the very most, I think. I was also educated in an English day school, called “The Grange,” where I studied for almost ten years. Fuentes was there too, because his father was in the diplomatic service. At home, I had a tutor who, it turned out, was also the tutor of my future wife, María del Pilar. In fact, the instructor left our house to take up the position of instructor for María del Pilar. Of course neither of us knew about this link until I met María del Pilar in Buenos Aires in 1968, I think it was.

Christ: Getting back to English literature, I want to ask if Don Andrés in *Coronation* is a character out of James's *The Ambassadors*. Isn't the old woman, Misiá Grey, directly descended from Miss Havisham in Dickens's *Great Expectations*?

Donoso: Yes, but funnily enough you have two elements which I think one has to combine and look at. Definitely there was an inheritance from Miss Havisham. Just as certainly there was an inheritance from Juliana in *The Aspern Papers*. There's that same character then. But this lady, who is so literary, is in fact a portrait of my grandmother. You see, Miss Havisham was a member of my family! So much so that my family cut me off completely after I published this book because they thought it was a very bad show on my part: I had used my own grandmother. It's a portrait of her, which they said everybody would recognize . . . and having said such horrible things about her! So, in a way, my life responded to the literary. It was a question of how did literature happen in me, say, when I found the counterpart of literature in my own life. It was *absolutely* that. Suddenly, I found that my own home, because of my reading and because of the things that I liked, the home I lived in, my past had a correspondence with certain things that I need in literature and would, in a way, elicit.

Christ: So all that "influence" means in your case is that literature made available to you your own subject matter: your own life.

Donoso: Absolutely.

Christ: Borges once wrote to the effect that for many years he believed that he grew up in a garden but then found out that he had grown up in his father's library. Is that description appropriate to you too?

Donoso: It's a good similarity, but in a way I'm slightly different. When I first read that sentence by Borges, I immediately pounced on it and said it was me. But, in fact, it isn't. My childhood and youth were bookish, but not in their essence. My book was my family world. It was essentially my parents, my brothers, the servants, cousins, trips to the country where my family had land—these were the essence. And these patterns are what I repeated so often in my work: the theme of the family as a type of bond, which almost—all of a sudden—almost strangled me.

Christ: You've written that only when your mother's garden no longer exists will you feel finally and really on your own.

Donoso: Sure. I think that one of the great experiences of my life was to be possessed by a family, and a class, and a way of life—up to a certain point. The breaking away from the family, then the experience of being dispossessed, and then the experience of creating, in fact, a world—a new version—where I could possess myself. But you know, I've always been fascinated by gardens—Italian gardens, not English gardens. Italian gardens are novels in themselves and they are, of course, the fruit of the baroque. Some in fact are more like nightmares than gardens. Besides being novels, they are history too; they are full of phantoms, they are slightly monstrous. I am very interested in the formalization of nature through landscaping and my ideal *espacio cerrado* would be a garden.

Christ: You have a preference for the baroque, for complexity rather than simplicity. Is this a Latin American or a personal characteristic? What are its qualities?

Donoso: I refuse to define the baroque. And I refuse to define myself as baroque, since it seems to transcend the meaning of mere complexity. Let it be enough to say that I am bored—for myself, I sometimes admire it in others—with the “well-made” thing as an unchallenged canon. I prefer the artificial to the “natural,” which seems to be the God-like, unquestioned measure of perfection, especially in so much American writing and which, though it *did* yield its crop and has taught a lot, tends to introduce a kind of fear in the young writers-to-be, and this is not the eighteenth century. Control has its points. But how controlled is the aesthetic “control” which is prompted by fear?

Christ: If the closed world of the family is the source for much of your fiction, how do you account for the other social element that is always present too?

Donoso: Perhaps it's an interesting thing to state here that the first book I ever published was dedicated “To Teresa Vergara who does not know how to read.” She is the servant who brought me up and who went to my house before I was born, and who is still with my parents. And still doesn't read. She doesn't know my books, and she was *furious* when they told her how I had dedicated my first collection of stories to her because “Now everybody's going to know that I don't know how to read.” The point is this: a boy of my upbringing would never have had any kind of access to

people of another class . . . *at all!* Would not know how they live, would never know anything at all about them. Except for what one gets through the servants. So, really, the great bridge—the great eye of knowledge for the present, for the ills of the present, let's say—is the servants. But they are also the great eye of knowledge and of vision for the past, for the real, for the genuine past in myth. Why? Because these servants are repositories of a whole lot of mythologies, of stories, of idiosyncracies, of superstitions, which certainly our parents rejected because they were enlightened people. So the dark part of life, in a way, was also provided by the servants. Everything in my novels is autobiographical. But, it is autobiographical in the sense that it is a very common, very middle-class thing; or, rather, was in those days, and I lived through it. The servants were the ones who fooled the separation—the simplification—of life into middle and lower class, the ones who cut through that segregation, and shared characteristics of the “inner space” of my novels (house, brothel, convent, etc.) as well as of the “outer space” of my novels, and also acted as a go-between for the myths of both spaces.

Christ: It interests me that you say “dark.” You are a witty, punning, lively man but your books could be looked at as the dark side of that world presented in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Donoso: Look, somebody was trying to get me to take certain pills the other day—this new vitamin thing which I'm not into. And they were trying to make me take vitamins so that I could remember my dreams. One great loss in my life has been that I have always felt that I have dreamed a great deal but I'm never able to remember my dreams. She said to me: “Why don't you take these pills so you'll remember your dreams?” I suddenly thought of the answer: But then I won't write books! So, what is it? Probably just that my dreams are pretty difficult to accept for my own self. Consequently, I suppress them. Probably that suppressed thing comes out in my writing. Also, my vision of life is pretty gloomy. I'm not really a joking person; I just tend to put that act on. I'm not in general a very happy man, I guess. I tend to be joking in public because I try to win people over. I try to woo people.

Christ: What effect did psychoanalysis have on your writing?

Donoso: My experience was not in fact a happy one. I wanted to understand people as I wished to understand things in myself. But, as it was an unhappy experience, I wanted to eliminate all kinds of orthodoxy. I did not want to write novels that are Freudian be-

cause I knew what Freudianism was and I saw that it could be a pitfall and a narrowing down of things in my own writing. Analysis did help me to accept certain relationships, certain ambiguities, and to live with them and to know a little of what goes on, but I didn't get any kind of a theory from it. Actually, I wish I *had*—in many ways. It would make things very much easier; but, then again, there's my terrible resistance to this implication.

Christ: "Symbiotic" seems to be the best word for describing relationships in your fiction. Is this your sense of life as well as of literature—as in the vampiristic fiction of Henry James, of D.H. Lawrence?

Donoso: I don't know what my sense of life is. If I knew it, I wouldn't be writing novels but teaching, or writing essays. "Symbiotic" is a good word, though. Certainly if vampirism is what readers perceive in the relationships between people in my novels, it must be at least a component of them. I hope not the only one. Not because I disdain vampirism, but because I disdain the mindlessness of boiling down the complexities of a metaphor to the false lucidity of one word.

Christ: In much the same way, you seem to distrust symbols, Freudian or otherwise.

Donoso: For me, everything is a symbol. But I refuse to deal with symbols that have an exact correlative in reality. I do not accept, I am not interested in, symbols that can be substituted for the meaning. I only use symbols when I don't know the meaning. I think that all literature is the extreme of lucidity that an author can give. I can't be more lucid than that.

Christ: You intend to incorporate into that lucidity things that are not ordinarily considered lucid, rational?

Donoso: Sure, sure.

Christ: Your experience with morphine at the time of your illness—again recalling Borges, with his septicemia—was a kind of watershed for you?

Donoso: It surely was. It also enabled me to write *The Bird* and probably not to write anything like it again. My writing from *The Bird* on has been very different.

Christ: What were your difficulties in finishing that book?

Donoso: The difficulties were enormous. One, of course, was that I didn't know what I wanted to write. I set out to write something, but it wasn't clear. I accumulated a vast amount of material that somehow hung together.

Christ: The book grew, like so many images within it, by putting one thing inside another?

Donoso: Yes. Absolutely, yes.

Christ: In *Coronation* you used a conventional third-person narrator; in *This Sunday* you alternate between first and third, and in *The Bird* you seem to be writing a point of view on a point of view.

Donoso: Sure, it's a novel about novel writing. The whole novel ends with a bunch of papers, which were the novel, being burned. It's a funny thing, you know, and is probably my greatest experience as a writer: did you know that that ending didn't appear in the book right up until I was correcting the galleys? The book ended in a thousand ways, but I didn't tie it together until I had the galleys.

Christ: Did the ending, where the events of the novel are revealed to be so many pages of a manuscript, owe anything to the comparable ending of Fuentes's *Change of Skin*?

Donoso: I hadn't read *Change of Skin* in 1969, when I wrote that end. Even if I had, I think the root of it lies elsewhere, and it is in Proust. *Le temps retrouvé* is the novel *retrouvé*. Life and novel are not distinctly separated. One annuls—and recreates—the other. Proust is certainly the source of this, as of so many other things in me—probably of so many other things in Fuentes.

Christ: If *The Bird* is a technical *tour-de-force* in dealing with points of view, it is also a fairly explicit statement about the nature of human personality—one that could take us back to Freud or, more to the point, back to Borges and his famous essay "The Nothingness of Personality."

Donoso: Sure, because psychological unity is only, I think, something that we owe to our imagination of it, something we imagine so we can use ourselves. "Personality" is a concept, an invention of the intellect, a simplification. I fear simplification more than anything: thus it plays a part in my life and in my books. A gradual drifting away—starting with *Coronation* and ending with *The Bird*—from the simplifications of "personality." In the book that I'm writing now *Casa de Campo* (Country House), I'm working the other way. Using the idea of "personality," the very simplification—shades of Dickens again—to go beyond it. If in *The Bird* I achieved fluid, intertwined, mutating personalities to render a complexity of feeling, in the new novel I'm using monolithic entities, solid "personalities," to render a complexity with them.

Christ: The notion of the meaninglessness of "personality" leads Borges to metaphysics, but it leads you back to the world—to things, to people.

Donoso: Surely, but you see, again, my main interest *is* in objects.

This is something which interests me a huge amount: how things, for me or in my writing, are terribly — how can I put it? — *transparent*, and suddenly lead on to other things. I remember when *Coronation* came out in England, somebody called it an “over-furnished novel,” which I rather like. Certainly, my stuff is *terrifically* over-furnished! But it’s over-furnished to a point, I think. It’s over-furnished to the point that Dickens is over-furnished. I think that Edmund Wilson talks about the importance in Dickens of the physical world and how this physical world becomes a menacing presence, how objects take on a menacing presence which means something, which gives an atmosphere to his books that speaks for itself. This is what I want to do with things.

Christ: Like William Carlos Williams saying that there are no ideas except in things?

Donoso: In things. Yes, that’s right. You will notice, for instance, in my novels that I will never — except in *Coronation*, and that was a bad mistake — be rational. I will have no rational characters who will talk about generalities. The mistake with the narrator of *Coronation* was that the omniscient narrator explains things. And that some of the characters explain themselves to readers. Again, I have nothing in particular against this method, though it is not now in fashion; but I don’t carry it to its extreme and I don’t use it. It seems like an accident and it does not satisfy me. Not because it is not “controlled,” but because it is not literary; that is to say, not discovered in the process of writing, but an unconscious and uncritical habit which came from reading novels and not really sorting out what I had read.

Christ: You are critical, always, in the choice of names for your characters. Do you keep lists as James did?

Donoso: No, I don’t. Funnily enough, in that matter, I’m very precise. I don’t fiddle about at all! This is one of the things I’m best at: the choosing of names. My naming is not done the way of, say, Evelyn Waugh, or Dickens, or James even; but the names do have meaning, they generate an aura. And that is important for me. But I generally don’t beat about the bush; I just go and grab something.

Christ: What about Maya in *This Sunday*? I get a reference to Greek mythology, to the Indian culture of the Americas, to the veil of illusion.

Donoso: Somehow, the terrible thing is that reality is prior to literature, and somehow reality *is* literature, in fact. Because the whole

episode of Maya is again a real episode, something that did happen. The character is a picture of my mother and Maya is the man whom she got involved with. His real name was Maya. Of course, the fact that I kept it, having changed everything else, means something. I don't know why I wrote the novel. Now I only know why I wrote that name. Certainly it was a reference to the Indian culture; certainly it was to the goddess of the dead. I knew a little bit of this about the veil, but I didn't know too much; I didn't know much about Indian literature, but I certainly did know that. Probably all of this, without using it consciously, led me to keep the name. It was a good name. It is an uncommon name.

Christ: Yes, and the sound is very beautiful. How attentive are you to that quality—the sound of the prose?

Donoso: When my first book of short stories came out, an old critic in Chile, an old Spaniard from Chile's revolution, wrote one of the first articles on my stuff. He said that for the most part the beauty of a language is not a question of the sensory; it is a question of the intelligence. It has nothing to do with sensuality. I think I would stick by that. I think that I'm trying things which are so, in a way, complex—or, if they are not complex, it's just a matter of their being complex for me—and I can't deal with that question. To get involved with the sensuality of the language would mean really getting involved with something I'm not particularly interested in. I admire it greatly in other people. I even like it a great deal. In fact, I envy it a great deal. But, somehow, there's a part of me that is glad to know I don't have it. I conceive of myself. . . well, it does go with a dryness, with a gloominess. How can you be gloomy and sensual at the same time? They're sort of a contradiction in terms, aren't they? There's a pretty bleak vision of life in my stories. You see, this is the point: if I want to portray the sensuality of life, and I think I have a very keen sense of vision—I see a lot, I see detail, I have a fantastic memory for details. I can tell you how a certain person was dressed thirty years ago, I remember it all. I can say how the light fell at a certain point. Since I want to portray detail: of sensuality, of a visual world, of smell, of taste, of the tactile world, I get the feeling that I would get lost in a world of sensual words. The actual sensuality of the word would be more important than that which it portrays. And as I'm trying to get a lucidity, a precision of things more than anything else, the detail must be precise. Therefore I don't want to use the sensory nature of language. But I think that my novels are terribly

filled with details of vision, of smell. I am a person who devours detail.

Christ: Speaking of vision, I recall that your manuscript pages are covered with drawings. Did you ever consider painting as a career?

Donoso: Yes, very much so. To begin with, I'm a fantastic doodler. If you pick up anything in this house, it's covered with drawings and what have you. I remember we were at Kurt Vonnegut's house once and we were playing Scrabble. I was doodling on a page like that. Apparently I left it there. The next day Kurt Vonnegut shows up with that drawing of mine framed! It's something he's kept. Some people have kept my drawings because they think—not because they're particularly good—they're pleasant, they're amusing, but technically, again, extremely detailed.

Christ: Have any painters—or moviemakers for that matter—directly influenced your work?

Donoso: Painting, more than the cinema, has been a life-long addiction. It must have certainly influenced me, since so much in my books is “visual,” so much can be broken up into *tableaux*. The breaking up of personality, of the self, the transformation—isn't much of it to be found, say, in Picasso? Besides that, there were, especially in *The Bird*, conscious efforts at evoking certain painters: the tenebrists, Caravaggio, Rembrandt, and Georges de la Tour.

Christ: *The Bird* is put together by a kind of narrative doodling, isn't it?

Donoso: Yes. In all, there were eighteen manuscripts for the novel. Writing it was like peeling off my own skin; that novel is my flesh and blood and it possessed me, it took control of me and my life—all very painful and very difficult. Flaubert said that he was *Madame Bovary*; well, I am my novel.

Christ: What made you decide not to pursue painting as a career?

Donoso: The knowledge that I had no talent for it. I didn't kid myself at any point. Also, it's strange, but one of the books I read with great relish when I was about seventeen was *Of Human Bondage*. I loved it! And I had been a painter up to then. I was always planning to be a writer, but the painting was what was uppermost. There's a character in that book, a girl named Fanny Price—I still remember!—who committed suicide because she was not a great painter. And I always said: I'm Fanny Price in that sense but I don't want to have to commit suicide—which is a lot of very liter-

ary stuff. For a young boy it was okay, I suppose. But somehow I am not really a painter at all, at all. For me, the movies came very late in life and painting came very, very early. I remember *huge* fights with my father over Ingres when I was about twelve. And that was very much my world. In my life one of the great things has been the visual arts: painting, sculpture, but especially architecture, urbanism, gardening.

Christ: The Boom in Latin American painting has not been nearly as widely recognized as the Boom in literature. Is that a question of quality or publicity?

Donoso: I don't think publicity has anything to do with it, actually, and I don't think that quality has a great deal to do with it either. In the first place, the world of plastic art at this point is in a very difficult spot. It speaks to very few people; it speaks to very few minds. And it hasn't really renovated itself to a great extent, and it hasn't found a voice the way that I think the novel did find voices.

Christ: But you are concerned with the "plastic" quality of literature, aren't you? I have heard you speak of Hemingway's "transparency," of Proust's "density," of your not liking to have pages of solid type in your novels.

Donoso: There's a pretty tightly connected ecology within each novel. The "plastic" quality of the written page, which I tend to be fussy about, is another link in that ecology, an unconscious component which, by focusing the in-attention on itself, liberates the imagination to concentrate on other aspects of writing. It is, nevertheless, a very minor link—as far as I know—of the ecology of my novels.

Christ: Related to this question of density is the question of audience. Whom do you think of as your audience?

Donoso: You. People like you. People who are sensitive, intelligent, and probably well-read. You know, I would love to be popular, God knows, but I know I never will be. Not because I make great intellectual demands because, after all, outside of *The Bird*, none of my books is very demanding—pretty simple and straightforward things. *The Bird* is demanding—I recognize that. My books are not easy only in the sense that they're not easy to relate to. People like to relate to things; people like to see themselves pictured, like to see themselves reflected. This I don't do with great ease. And then people like to be right in the middle, in the hub of life, of contemporary life. I'm not. I am not. I don't relate to that.

I don't have anything to do with that sort of subject. Again, there are certain things in everyday life which I feel I'm very much into, but . . . somehow I can't write about them. I have to go and find things in my past or in my box of symbols — it's a limited box, after all — that I can sort of place in different positions and relate to each other and do something meaningful, if I can.

Christ: Calaceite, where you have been living, is certainly out of the hub.

Donoso: It's monastic. I won't do it again. I've been doing that for five years, and both my wife and I realize that it's been in a way destructive. This trip to the States, all this moving about, has been good for us. There I get up at ten o'clock in the morning; I put on my djellaba; I go to my study; I stay there until three or four o'clock in the afternoon; I have lunch at four in the afternoon; I go for a walk with my wife; I pick up my daughter at school; I go back home; I read or I putter about a little bit around the house; I write letters — I like writing letters — we have dinner; we go to bed. At night, in bed, I write diaries — I have a huge number of diary journals — and meditate in my diary on what I'm going to do the next day or criticize what I've done today.

Christ: Something like the Jamesian notebooks?

Donoso: Again, yes. I have about forty on *The Bird* alone.

Christ: Do you do much revising?

Donoso: Oh yes. But with age, it's become sort of mechanical. I mean I will write one draft straight through without going back *at all*, without revising one single word. I just go PSSSHT as fast as I can to reach the end. Then I will go back and revise and do a second draft which will be probably much longer than the first draft . . . much longer, sometimes twice as long, which is revision and also a question of montage, of cutting things and placing them in a different order, of pruning things out, putting other things in, and so on. I do that and the novel swells up to double what it was. And then I do a third draft, which again reduces it. So the first draft is shorter than the second, and the second is longer than the other two.

Christ: While you were revising *The Bird*, did you change its title?

Donoso: The book was called, at the beginning, *El ultimo Azcoítia*, "The Last of the Azcoítias," and then it was an elegant tale of some twenty pages, very simple and classically constructed. When I read it to a friend of mine, she said: "Oh, but this is complete imagination. This doesn't exist in reality." "What do you

mean?" I said. "It's a completely realistic thing. Don't be ridiculous." And we had an argument. And I told my wife, "I'm going to write this story because I want to write something completely simple and classical and straightforward, in the shape of an Isak Dinesen tale." Straight from the shoulder. I just will have no truck with the complication these young Latin American writers get into. I just refuse to have anything to do with them. I just think I'm incapable of doing anything as complex as Vargas Llosa does. Then, of course, things began to pile up and that idea went down the drain. The novel had all sorts of names. But essentially I had been planning, that is, I had kept that quotation from William James from the time I first read it and I planned to use it for the title of another book, of some book. I liked the title. But somehow I saw that this related completely to it.

Christ: Isak Dinesen is a writer who interests you?

Donoso: She interested me at one point. I haven't read more of her, probably because she doesn't take much more reading. But at one point she did interest me. I translated one of her books into Spanish, her *Last Tales*. I also translated John Dickson Carr's biography *The Life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*. What else have I translated? I can't remember all that I've translated and what my wife has because we've done so much work together in that field, including Françoise Malet-Joris's *Les Personnages* and Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*.

Christ: Getting back to revisions, I understand that your novella, *Hell Has No Limits*, was originally a paragraph or so in *The Bird*.

Donoso: Actually, *The Bird* was built not so much by adding as by taking out. It was built by different strata accumulating. I would begin to write from the beginning and then at one point I felt that it wasn't good. And then I got an idea for a different beginning, which is a completely different world. And I began writing from the beginning with this new idea for the book and incorporated what I had already written and went further than that which I'd written by incorporating. The third strata would be another idea. I must have had thirty or forty starts, which are all worked into the final version. But I didn't understand the unit that became *Hell Has No Limits* until I read the galleys. I didn't have the picture, I didn't even have the meaning of the novel! The meaning of the novel—if there is a meaning—is right at the end. But this I didn't realize until I was correcting galleys.

Christ: In *Triple Cross*, where *Hell Has No Limits* appears along with

novellas by Fuentes and Sarduy, metamorphosis or transformation seems to be the basic theme or technique.

Donoso: Technique, I would say, rather than theme.

Christ: Was there any collaboration between you three? Or were the stories worked out separately?

Donoso: Completely separate. Wait a minute. I think that Carlos Fuentes was writing his when I was in Mexico writing mine. I was living in his house, you see. I'm not sure if he was working on another novel. We were in his garden in Mexico, and I remember that there was a swing for his daughter Cecilia and they were making a film from one of his stories and one of the actors began to swing. Both Carlos and I were there talking with him. I remember Carlos questioning this boy and he told the little story of Fuentes's *Zona sagrada* (*Holy Place*). He told the story and Carlos picked it up from there; he elaborated it, of course. But there I saw the beginning of *Zona sagrada*, there on that swing that morning. While I was writing *Hell Has No Limits*, which is dedicated to Carlos.

Christ: How did the idea for the paragraph in *The Bird* that became the novella come about?

Donoso: I can't remember the original idea. It's one of those ideas that a writer suddenly has crop up in his typewriter without having *any* control of it whatsoever. You're writing something and then suddenly you just. . . there's a paragraph that writes itself alone, with no relation to anything you can find in relation to it—it just happens. And this was a paragraph I remember quite well—and it's interesting that it should be that way—remember when Boy leaves his father's house and goes out into the world and comes back to La Riconada and wants the doctor to cut everything he has seen away from his brain so that he will not remember it? Well, what he saw outside was actually the brothel in *Hell Has No Limits*. Remember one of the characters in *Hell Has No Limits* is one of the prostitutes who has a gentleman coming from far away to visit her and to make love with her? Well, that's Boy. That's all that's left of Boy in *Hell Has No Limits*.

Christ: So even your novels have a kind of family relationship?

Donoso: Certainly they do.

Christ: In your three full-length novels, you are committed to telling two stories. *Hell Has No Limits* is more radically unified.

Donoso: Sure. It's a novel I wrote very quickly, in about a month and a half. I could visualize, again, a world of separate classes, a sepa-

rate world in the novel. A symbol of it is seen in Pancho's relation to the world of the little girl who got chicken pox from him and whom he used to see playing behind barbed wire.

Christ: Is the world as you experience it so divided?

Donoso: No, no. It's just my simplification. But you can't say that *The Bird* is binary; it's more than just binary. I think I held onto the binary until I could face the multiplicity of things. One of the things that I see wrong with *Coronation* is the black-and-whiteness of it. The fact that it is so binary in many ways. I think that I've had to leave my own world of childhood, of adolescence, to be able to face a world of multiplicity. And this has happened.

Christ: Is writing one of the ways you resolved the division?

Donoso: To resolve is not to make a rational order out of anything: to me that would only superimpose another layer of confusion. But to resolve would be to understand, *with the whole of me* (and I'm not trying to be Lawrence, but just to debunk the idea that to resolve can be equated with rational order, at least in literature), and with my life, and with the exploration into aesthetics that a novel is, with the adventure into the mad, dark thing that living and society are, that writing a novel is.

Christ: Given the narrator, *Coronation* had to be binary. *This Sunday* already opens up, begins to bifurcate; and once you allow Umberto in *The Bird* to be what he is, then everything in that book bifurcates.

Donoso: Umberto was a very late addition to *The Bird*. As an addition, he was one of the latest. And the yellow bitch was very, very late. That was a year before the end of the novel.

Christ: How long were you at work on it?

Donoso: Eight years. I went around, around, around, and around the novel and I couldn't grab it. Until I went mad, and then I cried.

Christ: Dogs are important in your symbol box.

Donoso: Yes. Sure, they're related to my biography. I have been a dog person all my life. I have always lived among dogs. My wife and I are very fond of dogs. My father has always had a huge number of dogs around the house—Great Danes and great, big Boxers and what have you, dogs of all kinds.

Christ: In your writing they tend toward the terrifying, the malevolent.

Donoso: As a symbol of power, I'd say, don't you think? Again, all power, to me and in my books, is wicked and avenging. One of the things in my books is that they are not dialectical. I mean,

there's just one side to things. And all power tends to be malevolent.

Christ: One-sided maybe, but the end of *Hell Has No Limits* has puzzled many readers.

Donoso: But it's quite clear. It was funny, because I put in an appearance at a seminar where they were discussing this book. I asked them how the novel ended and they didn't know. They had just finished reading it and they didn't know how it ended! So I asked them: when Pancho and Othario take Manuela to the brook — remember? — what happens? What is it that they do? And nobody came up with the answer. Of course it is a violation, a sexual violation, penetration. Nobody in the seminar could face that. They couldn't face that because, of course, if there was sexual violation, they would have to revise the whole reading of the novel. And they didn't dare revise Pancho because they would have had to revise themselves, which is the key to the whole thing, of course. On the other hand, *The Bird* is a much more intellectual book. It's much more of a novel where ideas and symbols are played with, and in which form is played with.

Christ: You have a very clear grasp of all this. Do you ever find that your critical faculty gets in your way?

Donoso: No, because I think the one process is so completely different from the other. Analysis is always something which will work for you rather than against you. It does, really. I mean, when I'm writing a book and then I go to bed at nine or ten, say, with my journals, and then I analyze lucidly what I've done before and what I'm going to do next — this doesn't work against me at all. It feeds it and it helps me to go one step beyond. This is why I think that, in *The Bird* especially, one gets a sense of mystery. Because I want to go beyond each time, you see. If I've arrived here, let's say, in the writing of a book, one day I'll write beyond that, up to here, in the criticism. And the next day, from this point I'll write further, up to here, let's say, and that night with the criticism I will write further and so on. It works. It is a cumulative thing.

Christ: Since criticism goes hand in hand with the sensibility of the Boom writers, how is it that we get so little first-rate criticism from Latin America?

Donoso: The thing is, you see, that I think that the most valid kind — at least to me the most interesting kind — of criticism is that which doesn't ask *why* and doesn't ask *what* is the meaning of a work. It is the criticism that asks the question *how*? And I don't think that

Latin American critics know that there is a *how* at all. This is not a question that has ever been posed to their minds, you see. The *how* of a novel doesn't matter. It is the *what*! And the *why*. I tend to prefer to read criticism by fellow writers rather than by critics. I enjoy that tremendously! What we call *la cocina*, you know, the kitchen of writing is one of the most interesting things in the world.

Christ: You people in the Boom have a notoriously close relationship; it's almost like a literary family. Has there been much of an exchange of criticism?

Donoso: No. It's not at all a literary family. Not at all. It's literate insofar as we talk about books sometimes. But I certainly have never talked about books with García Márquez, for example. I talk about books with Vargas Llosa because he likes that. I enjoy talking shop with writers, but the thing is, you see, that writers in Latin America have been warned against this. Writers should not talk about anything "intellectual." There is this huge pose, this ghastly travesty of some kind, which is that a writer should be a simple fellow. When he's not. And he should not be interested in his craft; he should not talk about his craft with other writers at a gathering of writers. You hardly ever find people talking about literature at all. It's not *done*!

Christ: I think it was *Time* that talked about these extraordinary writers who don't so much write novels as "cater" them. Isn't there a self-exhausting quality of one-upmanship among the Boom writers?

Donoso: Sure there is: one-upmanship based on the natural vanity of authors. Everyone wanted to be the Balzac of his time, to recreate the true Latin American reality, and so each new novel had to go beyond the previous ones, to "kill off" its rivals. But now, in a way, hasn't the time come to sort of turn back a little bit? And say: Well, is this okay? Can we go on? Of course, one has to arrive at the limit of things to be able to turn back. One can't turn back before one has got to the limit of things. And the whole thing is that we have got to the limit of things. Another problem is arteriosclerosis: you know all our writers suffer from it, in a literary way, sooner or later. And, God, I don't want that to happen, I don't want to become an arteriosclerotic writer! I fight it. I keep fighting it. We have to.

Christ: In a certain sense, you're saying that the Boom is over.

Donoso: No, I'm not saying that. I'm saying that a certain attitude of

novel-writing will probably end pretty soon. We have certain rumblings in that direction from, let's say, Vargas Llosa in *Captain Pantoja and the Special Service*, which is not a *huge*, ambitious novel, but a relatively modest, very intelligent, beautifully done novel. It's not an easily repeated novel. Whereas most of the big novels of the Boom are, in effect, big, encyclopedic. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and all of Carlos Fuentes's novels are encyclopedic. Most of Vargas Llosa's, all of Cortázar's. Now the newer writers are giving us shorter books, almost in reaction to those huge encyclopedias. I'm thinking of Puig, of Sarduy.

Christ: What is the direction of this newer prose?

Donoso: One direction is that of the novel as poetry, novel as words — the direction, say, of Sarduy. The other would be in the direction of the novel as detachment, of pure story, which would be the novels of Puig and the novels of Vargas Llosa.

Christ: This relates to your distinction between an *idioma personal* or *lírico* and an *idioma general* or *genérico* as the two basic rhetorical strategies in the novel.

Donoso: That's what I'm trying to get at. Let's say the *idiomas*, the languages, are going to be wholly different. One is going to be the *idioma personal*, the lyrical language of Sarduy. The other is going to be the generic language and generic thinking of the wholly-detached story of Vargas Llosa or Puig — using a language which is not essentially theirs — documents, journalism, for example — but belonging to a certain section of the culture, which they are rescuing and making alive.

Christ: Where do you put yourself?

Donoso: I have no idea. Certainly, as we talked about earlier, I have no feelings for words as such and their beauty and sensuality. I can't manage that. So I have to put myself in the second category: this recuperation of ancient, of sort of dead languages, which I think I'm doing in the novel I'm writing now, *Casa de Campo*. It's a symbolic novel. When one comes down to what it is, it's an allegory: family, predictably; servants, predictably — it's the world I generally deal with. But it's blown up into fantasy by quantity. It's a fantastic family, with thirty-five cousins, ages five to fifteen, who are left alone in a big country house. And the parents go away and forget to come back.

Christ: What was the point of origin for this novel?

Donoso: Oh, it comes from memories too, from seeing my daughter Pilarcita playing with Vargas Llosa's children. It's quite a happy

book, and I'm writing it quite easily. All my symbols are there, and I'm also playing with time, with different ideas of time, with all sorts of things like servants whom we feel to be there but who never actually speak, for example, and with little children who speak like grownups.

Christ: What about its language or *idioma*?

Donoso: I use a language that is stilted, that which was used in the prose of the last century. It's very much the prose of the Marquesa de San Coeur. It's recovering that language, that possibility of a novel. It's really an attitude towards life, a language is always an attitude toward life.

Christ: What about the language of Poe?

Donoso: Oh, very much. He's the first short story writer I ever read. It's pretty clear that you Americans invented the short story in its modern form and that in America the short story is the greatest in the world. We, I think, became aware of the short story through American fiction and we were very much influenced by American fiction at one point. But I have to talk about Poe as a very young reader. I never read him again. Certainly he was a huge figure of romanticism and the gothic. I mean, I certainly think I understand gothicism through my relation with Poe as a young man, or as a boy, really. I read Poe in English when I was what—twelve? And I was absolutely fascinated. Native authors were read to rebel against them, native authors being Spanish and Spanish-American ones. Reading foreign writers meant a transgression into another area.

Christ: Wouldn't you place your stuff in the gothic tradition?

Donoso: Well, I certainly think that there is a lot there. I mean, certainly I would relate to that.

Christ: Are there any English-language writers who have importance for you right now?

Donoso: At this point? Funnily enough, you see—I think this is true all the time—while one is being influenced, one doesn't notice the influence. One only sees it in retrospect. So, I may be influenced at this point by anything . . . but I don't think I am, I don't feel it. And I wouldn't know whom I could place my hands on. I read my Latin American contemporaries with avid interest, curiosity—and malevolence. I read them. I just can't stay away from them. Then I read whatever falls into my hands pretty much. I'm not a very tidy reader at all. I stroll all over the place. Since I've been here, what have I read? A lot of Doris Lessing—somebody I

didn't know at all. Everybody seems to be reading her.

Christ: You've talked about writing in English. Any definite plans?

Donoso: Not particularly. I would like to write a few magazine articles. I'm looking forward very much to writing travel books. I've tried to move away from novels a little bit, I'm sort of tired of them. I want very much to write a screenplay, and I'm going to go to Ethiopia to see what's in it. I want to write a play about the death of Rimbaud, about the last period of his life. He's a writer I'm very much interested in — not particularly his poetry, but his life. I'm interested in the orchestration of time there. I would like to branch out at this point. I'm sort of fed up with writing novels. I want to get through with this big one I'm doing now and just forget them for awhile. Perhaps some articles in English relating to houses. I'm also looking forward to writing things about myself. You see, a novel is not only a novel but it's what you can write *about* it as well, or around it. And I would like to do these sort of parasitical things on my novel, satellites and parasites and things around me: how it happened, why it happened, what were the mechanics of it, what is the relation of that to my biography.

Christ: To write more books like *The Boom in Spanish American Fiction*?

Donoso: Yes, I would very much like to go in that direction a little bit in a deeper way. *The Boom in Spanish American Fiction*, of course, was really the introduction to a book of essays that I was planning to write; there were about ten essays on contemporary Latin American fiction, of which I'd written *The Boom* and one more on Vargas Llosa.

Christ: That essay hasn't been published yet?

Donoso: No, it hasn't been finished. It's part of my future.

Joyce Carol Oates

OUR WALL

Long before many of us were born, The Wall was.

It is difficult for even the most imaginative and reckless of us to posit a time when The Wall *was not*.

Of course there are people—older people—who claim to remember not only the construction of The Wall (which, in its earliest stages, was rather primitive: primarily barbed wire, guarded by sentries and dogs) but a time when The Wall did not in any form *exist*.

Could one go freely into the Forbidden Zone then? We children never tire of asking, faintly scandalized and ready to burst into nervous laughter as if in the presence of something obscene. But the elderly tell us that there was no Forbidden Zone then, in the days of their youth.

No Forbidden Zone?—we are incredulous.

No Forbidden Zone?—we are somewhat frightened.

The shrewdest child among us, who is always asking bold, impudent questions, says brightly: If there was no Forbidden Zone then, why was The Wall constructed?

But no one understands his question. He repeats it insolently: *If there was no Forbidden Zone then, why was The Wall constructed?* No one, not even our oldest citizen, understands. Each of the boy's words, taken singly, is comprehensible; but the question in the entirety is incomprehensible . . . *Why was The Wall constructed?* It is far easier—most of us find it easier—to assume that The Wall is eternal, that it ever was and ever shall be. And that the Forbidden Zone (which of course none of us has ever seen) is eternal too.

Several times a year, though never on predictable dates, our leaders declare a Day of Grace. Which means that citizens of our country above the age of eighteen who are free of debt, familial responsibilities, and other private or civic handicaps, may attempt to scale The Wall without fear of punishment or reprisal. On a Day of Grace all explosives buried in the earth are inoperative; the current

flowing through the barbed wire is shut off; the watchdogs are tied fast with chains; the sentries in their sentry boxes, hidden from sight, do not poke the muzzles of their submachine guns out and fire. It is said that on each Day of Grace a number of citizens do run across the burnt-out section of earth before The Wall (in some parts of the city it is no more than thirty feet wide, in others it is at least one hundred feet wide and represents, as one can well imagine, a formidable expanse!)—a number of citizens do run to The Wall and scale it and disappear on the other side. And are not stopped, not even scolded. So it is said.

And what becomes of them, on the other side? No one knows.

Of course we are only human, and rumors fly from house to house, wild improbable tales are told and repeated and embellished, no one knows what to believe. It may be claimed that a Day of Grace has been announced for a certain area—a privileged area—and not for another; or that the Day will begin on the first stroke of noon instead of on the last, or on the first stroke of midnight instead of on the last; or that there will be no restrictions at all regarding age, financial status, etc. As one might well imagine, such cruel rumors result in butchery: the unstable rush forward too soon, or too late, or on the wrong day entirely, and before the horrified eyes of hundreds of witnesses (for there are always witnesses along The Wall) are shot down, or blown quite literally to bits by landmines, or savagely mauled by dogs. For we are, despite our history, a hopeful people.

Nevertheless each Day of Grace is eagerly awaited. Speculation on the exact date is widespread; we are all acquainted with certain obsessed and rather pathetic individuals who can speak of nothing else (though—of course!—these are the very individuals who would never dream of trying to scale The Wall). Even those who have never in their lifetimes witnessed a single successful escape (for sometimes the slang expression “escape” is used openly)—people who have been passive onlookers, for decades, at many a spectacular and heartrending slaughter—continue to have faith. One would think that their number might gradually dwindle, but the contrary happens to be true. For we are, as our historians have noted, a hopeful people.

The Wall appears to be about twenty-five feet high, though some theoreticians claim that it is considerably higher, while others believe that it may be lower. Measurements are imprecise since they must be made—if at all—at a distance from The Wall, and under

cover of darkness. It is a commonplace belief that The Wall is made of fairly smooth concrete, an ordinary enough material, and in itself not particularly fearful. The top has been rounded for aesthetic and security reasons: it is more attractive that way, and presents more difficulties for those who try to scramble over The Wall using their bare hands. (Barbed grappling hooks are said to be necessary for a successful escape, but such grappling hooks are forbidden by law. Indeed, there are those of us who have never seen a grappling hook, not even a picture of one: yet we whisper the words “grappling hook” amongst ourselves quite freely.) Our elders claim that The Wall did not always have a rounded top, but it is difficult for most of the population under a certain age—about forty—to remember any other kind of top.

In heavily populated areas of the city there are two additional “walls” or barriers. One is a wire-mesh fence with barbed wire at the top, which is (evidently) electrified; another is a row of anti-tank obstacles placed at five- or six-foot intervals. The obstacles, like The Wall itself, are painted a uniform dove-gray, and are quite attractive. Beds of yellow and purple pansies lend a cheerful touch: nothing extravagant, but welcome to the eye.

In less populated areas The Wall stands majestically alone, and in the burnt-out space before it landmines have been buried so carefully that (so it is rumored) not even the shrewdest eye can detect them. Nocturnal hares, poor creatures, frequently detonate these explosives. They know no better. We are often awakened from our sleep by the sharp cracking thunder of an explosion: is it near, or far? At such times we lie awake, not caring to speak, for what is there to say?—the hares know no better, they are poor ignorant beasts, and nuisances at that.

Two nights ago there was an explosion. Difficult to judge its distance. To the east, to the west?—difficult to judge. Did you hear that noise, one of us asks another softly, and the other says, Did I hear what? or perhaps does not reply at all. What is there to say? Nocturnal hares, nuisances.

The Wall is considered a work of art by some citizens, and an abomination by others. The largest percentage of the population, however, does not “see” The Wall at all—that is, literally. Consequently The Wall elicits no emotion and, indeed, the term *The Wall* is rarely used. The expression *over there* is fairly frequent, as in (to a naughty child): If you don’t behave I’ll send you *over there*.

(Over where? I once asked my mother boldly. Over *where?* *Where?*—You'll see over where, my mother said, slapping my face. Her breath came quick and hard; her own cheeks were burning.)

And do you know that children's bones are buried in The Wall?—in the foundation of The Wall? Children of exceptional beauty or talent—children who were orphans, or in some way unprotected—too high-spirited for their own good and for the good of the community. On dark wet nights when the wind blows from The Wall you can hear their querulous chatter.

Of course these are silly tales, in which none of us believe. In our district we have eradicated superstition. The Wall is The Wall and (so we believe) it is made of ordinary material. It is *not* haunted: its great strength has nothing to do with children's corpses.

Sometimes, late at night, you can hear their faint high voices. Where are we, what year is it, what has happened . . . ?

But no: there are no voices: there are no spirits. The Wall is only (*only!*) The Wall.

One of the voices is my brother's voice.

Do you hear him, I asked my parents, but they did not hear a thing. Only the wind, the wind. Rain drumming on the roof, on the windows. Streaming down the windowpanes.

I burrowed beneath the bedclothes to the foot of the bed and lay very still. My thumb and then two fingers stuck in my mouth. The wind, the wind from The Wall, rain drumming on the roof all night, his voice, his crying for help, I could see him dragging himself on the stubbled grass and his uplifted face glistening with blood: and the half circle of witnesses. For there are always witnesses—silent witnesses—along the many miles of The Wall.

Toward morning, when the wind died down, I fell asleep. And did not dream at all.

It is only a coincidence, but according to reliable sources the next Day of Grace will fall *on my eighteenth birthday*. Which is to say, at the very end of the interminable month of August.

The Wall: which stretches out forever. Mesmerizing and boring and beautiful, so beautiful! You can't know. You can't know unless you crouch here with me in my secret place, my hiding place, in a stand of scrub birch hundreds of yards from the nearest house.

Underfoot are shards of glass, fragments of board, rubble from The War (which took place long before I was born, before even the building of The Wall—if the old people can be trusted to tell the truth). I crouch here for long minutes at a time, staring at The Wall, letting its gray uniformity flood into my brain. Mesmerizing and boring, so boring, and so beautiful, our Wall!—long minutes, long unrecorded hours at a time, my back aching, my face beaded with sweat. I want nothing from The Wall, I am content merely to gaze upon it. Knowing that it is there. That it exists. That one cannot move *in that direction*. That there is a *Forbidden Zone* which has been explicitly marked, and from which we are to be protected forever. How was it possible for human beings in my country to live, to endure their lives, before the construction of The Wall?—when they might have *freely* moved in any direction, even in the direction of that which is forbidden? (The thought fills me with anxiety. Tears begin to sting in my eyes, and threaten to roll down my warm cheeks. To move *freely* in any direction, what horror!)

Gray concrete. Miles. Years. A lifetime. An eternity. So boring. At peace. So beautiful my heart plunges. In the midday sun, in the late afternoon sun, in a fine light drizzle that obliterates all outlines . . . The Wall is absolutely motionless . . . one cannot imagine a time when it was not . . . and the sentries' boxes every two hundred yards or so . . . the border guards (chosen for both their skill as soldiers and their loyalty to the State) hidden from view, even the muzzles of their submachine guns hidden. As a young boy I wanted to be one of them. But then the shame of my brother, the fuss, the black mark . . . I want to be one of them now. I want to sit for long empty mesmerizing hours inside a sentry box, a submachine gun in my hands, always ready, always ready to fire.

Ugly things are told about some of the border guards.

—They shoot *at will* if they choose. If a face offends them, or a gesture. If they are bored. If nothing exciting has happened in a long time.

—They themselves are frequently defectors. (Which is, of course, logical. For no one has such opportunity to escape as they do. Envidable men! I hate them, as everyone in my district does.)

—They have no more loyalty to the State than the next person, but enjoy the power of the sentry box and the feel, the weight, of the submachine gun in their hands.

I crouch in my hiding place for hours. Sometimes it seems that years have passed. I am not a child now. I am waiting.

Beyond The Wall the sky is a feathery blue, or a turbulent rippled gray. Sometimes it rains. Sometimes the sun glares. I am at peace, gazing at The Wall. Its wonderful sameness, its mysterious strength . . . while human beings change . . . grow old, weak, unreliable. I am at peace here. If I hear gunfire in the distance, or the barking of dogs, I am never agitated. For I do not intend to make a run for it like the others. I am content to live my life *on this side*.

What, precisely, is the Forbidden Zone, from which the citizens of my country must be protected?

Absolute truth is impossible to come by, since anyone who climbs The Wall successfully disappears from our world and never returns; and anyone who climbs The Wall unsuccessfully is killed on the spot. However, here are the most popular theories:

—There is a paradise beyond The Wall in which men and women live “freely.” (Though of course they must be bound—how could they fail to be?—by The Wall, just as we are. Perhaps it is somehow worse for them because our Wall surrounds them.)

—There are dangerous, diseased, psychotic people beyond The Wall. A race not unlike ours, but degenerate. A brother-race? But degenerate. At one point in history (evidently during the life-spans of some who are still living) all of us constituted a single race, from which the population of the Forbidden Zone fell away.

—There is nothing but a graveyard beyond The Wall: a mere dumping ground for the dead. The bleak truth of The Wall is that it protects the living from the dead (the noxious gases of the cemetery); or, as the more subtle among us reason, it protects us from our own future.

—There is an ordinary world beyond The Wall—our own world, in fact—but it is a mirror-image, a reversal. None of us could survive in it.

My own theory? I have none. I think only of The Wall. The fact of The Wall, which settles so massively in the mind. The Wall exists to be scaled, like all walls: it is the most exquisite of temptations. The Wall poses the question—*How long can you resist?*

I am a good runner, I can run for miles, my heart beats large and steady in my chest, my pulses race, my muscular body grows sweat-slick, I am pitiless toward my legs and feet; and my hands are strong. These are mere facts. They point toward nothing beyond themselves.

“Traitors,” “criminals,” “subversives,” “degenerates,” “enemies of the People,” “victims of aberration”: these are the official terms for those who defect from our side of The Wall. A formal death sentence is passed upon them in absentia, and their families are subjected to harsh penalties. (Though in fact it frequently happens that the families, having publicly exhibited their shame and grief, and having publicly vowed their love for and loyalty to the State, escape the most severe penalties and even enjoy a curious sort of celebrity. For humiliation, if it is properly absorbed, can be a sacred experience.)

Yet I would not abandon my family. My mother and father who lie to me, as they lie to each other; but out of necessity; out of love. I would not abandon them as others have.

I have never seen The Wall desecrated.

I have never been a witness.

Except: I was among that crowd of schoolchildren who gawked at the dying boy at the foot of The Wall one weekday morning. He had tried to escape during the night and had actually scaled The Wall—he was strong and supple, he must have prepared for his “escape” for many months in secret—but of course the guards shot him down, as they always do: who could elude them? They shot him during the night but did not kill him and so he lay for hours, for many hours, into the dawn, the morning, the mid-morning, bleeding to death in a field of stubbled grass, and calling for help. A high faint voice. An incredulous voice. Not a voice I recognized.

Sunday, the last Sunday of the month, is to be a Day of Grace. My eighteenth birthday. The official proclamation has not been made but rumors fly freely from house to house.

The Wall, in the midday sun, appears to show a certain *benevolent* aspect. If you stare for a very long time, your eyes held open wide, this *benevolence* becomes obvious. Yet why has no one remarked upon it, to my knowledge?

So few of my fellow citizens see The Wall at all.

Wasn't that your brother who was shot down in the field, people asked.

I don't have a brother, I said angrily.

Wasn't that your brother? — the one they shot down? school children teased.

My brother? Whose brother? I don't have a brother.

They jeered and threw stones at me. Chanted: He deserved it, he deserved it, the traitor, he deserved every bullet they gave him!

I don't have any brother, I shouted.

It is said, and if you climb high enough you can ascertain for yourself, that The Wall zigzags and curves back upon itself, by no means describing a perfect circle around the Forbidden Zone. Strange. Hard to comprehend. Unless the workers who built it were drunk, or playful. Or subversive.

To caress — just once — the blank face of The Wall. To get that close. To lay your hands upon it. Just once! In dreams, the most shameful and turbulent of dreams, where one is clambering up The Wall — *and* being riddled by the guards' bullets at the same time (for death too, at such a time, in such a manner, would be exquisite): in dreams we scale The Wall nightly, and keep our secrets to ourselves.

The Wall, where small yellow butterflies impale themselves upon the barbed wire. A great fist in my chest. Broken glass beneath my feet. A delirium that must be love . . . Of course there are lurid tales: men and even women shot down and dragged away and never heard of again, and never spoken of again. Because they stared too hard at The Wall. Might have seemed to be studying it, memorizing it. Adoring it. (Do I know anyone who has disappeared? I know no one. Disappearing carries with it the obliteration of memory, after all. *Everything* connected with a traitor is lost.)

A very strange tale, too wild to be credible, about a family in a balloon who drifted across The Wall. Seven people including a baby. Romantic but implausible . . . Wouldn't a large balloon make an irresistible target?

(Someday, it is whispered, we *will* overcome The Wall. And mate with those men and women on the "other side." As we are destined to do. As we had done in history. We will breed a race of

giants once again, we will conquer the world . . . The Wall, one must assume, has been erected solely to prevent this, the fulfillment of our destiny: The Wall is an invention of our enemies and must be surmounted.)

But now, today, this sunny morning, what of today?—my eighteenth birthday? A helmeted guard has poked his head out of his sentry box and is waving to me in my hiding place. Yes? Yes? Perhaps he knows it is my birthday? I stand slowly, blinking. The sunlight is fierce. The guard has taken pity on me, perhaps, and is waving me forward. Come stand in the shadow of The Wall. Come press your overheated cheek against The Wall's cool side . . . For the first time I can see fine cracks in The Wall, and weeds growing lavishly at its base. (I have never been so close before.) Come closer, have no fear, long before you were born The Wall was, and forever will The Wall endure.

PRAXIS

INTERNATIONAL

Editors: Richard J. Bernstein
& Mihailo Markovic

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Igor Pomeranzev

THE RIGHT TO READ

Rarely do Western readers have the opportunity to glimpse Soviet dissident life in parts of the Soviet Union other than Moscow, Leningrad, or Siberia. Igor Pomeranzev, a young Soviet Jewish writer and poet, presents a different and fresh perspective on "forbidden" dissident activity, in this poignant narrative of the formative influence of literature on his life while growing up in a provincial town in Ukraine and later while living in Kiev. In 1976, Igor Pomeranzev was arrested for possessing certain questionable books and threatened with a twelve-year sentence. After this arrest he became an outspoken supporter of imprisoned Jewish and Ukrainian dissidents, many of whom were members of the Ukrainian Helsinki Watchgroup. In October 1978, to avoid imprisonment he emigrated with his wife and six-month-old son. He now lives in London and works for the BBC Russian Service. Pomeranzev is a frequent contributor to Syntaxis, a journal edited by Andrei Sinyavsky in Paris. He also writes for Survey and various émigré Russian, Jewish, and Ukrainian journals.

Translator's note

The summers are hot in Kiev. I kept putting off my vacation till the end of August. The longer you wait for your meeting with the sea, the more gratefully it welcomes you. Besides, I had to wait until my cousin vacated her seaside cottage in Odessa and returned with her family to Moscow, leaving her keys with our mutual friends in Odessa. I arrived at the shore on the eve of the "velvet season." I did not want to lose a minute. Directly from the station I set off for the keys and made my way to the cottage. I did not unpack my suitcase. I hurriedly found my swimming trunks and towel, and ran down to the beach. I swam for a long time. I swam the breast stroke, the crawl, the backstroke. I rested for awhile on the breakwater. Then I swam to the buoy. Pressing my face against the rusty wet metal of the buoy and feeling the coiled metal line underneath with my foot, I

Translated by Marta Zahaykevich.

rested for several minutes and again struck out into the sea, working my arms, legs, and entire body. I did not just fall into the sand on the beach; I simply collapsed from sheer pleasure and exhaustion. It was just at that moment that they arrested me.

We drove in a private car from the 11th station to the center of town. On the right and left of me sat two stout, young KGB agents. In the front sat their friend, aged about fifty. My wet swimming trunks cut into my body. My pants turned wet from my trunks, leaving dark patches on the front and back. About one meter in front of me I saw the needle on the speedometer quivering. I kept thinking if only I would not tremble like that needle. There were people walking on the sidewalk. Some of them, not noticing that the car was full, tried waving us down to get a lift. How I would have loved to change places with any one of them. With what joy I would have walked along the burning pavement under the hot Black Sea sun, rather than be speeding away in this comfortable "Volga" to meet such a disquieting, such a morose unknown.

Dear reader, forgive me this shocking beginning. Even though I like Ian Fleming, I would always prefer Marcel Proust. But what can an admirer of Proust do when, on the last day of August, 1976, he was in fact carried away from the golden sands of the Black Sea by three bonebreakers, who, ignoring the quizzical looks of the other sunbathers, shoved him into a car and drove him down Karl Libknekht Street at 100 km/hr to the Committee of State Security in the city and county of Odessa that falls under the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian S.S.R.?

There is such an Article 62 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian S.S.R. Among other crimes listed in this article, you will find the "possession and dissemination of anti-Soviet literature." I have a feeling that most people who live in the West would make sense of "possession and dissemination" in their own way. They might imagine some sort of subversives, stained with printer's ink, who by the sweat of their brow print leaflets with the heading, "Down with the Soviet Government." Or else they might imagine some covert stranger standing by a photocopier, surrounded by hundreds of copies of pamphlets with some dynamically similar text. Let me explain. By "possession" is meant that in your own home on your night table or shelf, you may have books or magazines that were not published by the official publishers in the Soviet Union and which the investigating organs could consider anti-Soviet at their

choosing. But let us presume, the question of truth or falsehood aside, that by some miracle you were lucky enough to obtain a copy of *Doctor Zhivago*, a book already read and reread by the entire world and written by your fellow countryman, Pasternak. And, let us presume that you managed to read the book overnight, instead of the two nights for which you were loaned the book, and it inspired you. No, it totally enthralled you, not by its subject matter, nor by the academic play of imagery and characters, but by the naive faith of the author in the power of the subject matter and the necessity of those images. It was the endless lyrical, religious-philosophical, historical retreats from the subject that so enraptured your heart, with their ebbs of freedom and inspiration, and their recitatives that choke in your throat and leave you dizzy. And taking this weighty unweighable tome under your arm, you run to your best friend or to your loved one to share with them your inspiration, your happiness for the second saved-up day. It is this eagerness of yours that has no particular sense or purpose to it (except that there is a fine purpose, although it may be hidden, in sharing a reader's joy) that without further warning already qualifies as dissemination of anti-Soviet literature under Article 62. The question of printing presses or photocopiers does not even arise here. Just in case, God forbid, you happen to have two friends and both of them happen to reveal during a KGB interrogation that you gave them the ill-fated *Doctor Zhivago* to read, then any prosecutor has the right to sign a warrant for your arrest. But what if you did not know that this novel of Pasternak's is anti-Soviet literature? This is not a superfluous question. In reality, there is no public office in the Soviet Union that prints lists of anti-Soviet books. At one time, the poems of one of the classic Soviet poets, Sergei Esenin, were forbidden. There was also a time when the works of the Nobel laureate Ivan Bunin were erased as literature and his books were seen as criminal. Today he is viewed as a much acclaimed writer and his works are published in many volumed collections.

I remember one day in the early fifties when my father, a party journalist, brought home a book of the satirist Mikhail Zoshchenko, who was ferreted out by the Stalinist cultural propagandist, Zhdanov (and to this day there is a city and even a university named after him). At that time Zoshchenko was seen as a monstrous criminal. Late at night after my father put my brother and me to bed, he read the stories aloud to my mother, stories that were printed only after

the 20th Party Congress. They laughed so hard that they woke me up, and upon awakening I could not grasp why on earth they could be laughing so much. Now I think that it was not only the prose that they liked, but the fact that they were taking pleasure in something forbidden, something that most of their friends and colleagues not only could not touch, but would not have dared to touch.

Today, along with the writers tortured and murdered in camps and prisons, the authorities rehabilitate their books. Obviously, not all of the writers who were killed are rehabilitated. To add to this, the ones who are rehabilitated are looked at shamefacedly. And their books, too, are published with embarrassment—in condensed forms, with cuts, and in limited editions. For decades, Russian readers waited for the poems, prose, and essays of Osip Mendelstam to come out. Bit by bit, they collected Mendelstam's legacy, risking accusation under the clause "possession and dissemination." I first became acquainted with Mendelstam's lyrical verse not by reading it, but by hearing it recited. It was passed on from person to person like watchwords. His poetry signified a quality of spiritual resistance. I think that if the regime were to transform all of Russian poetry into ashes, there would emerge several hundred people who would be able to recreate it from memory. I think that nowhere in the world do people memorize poetry as in Russia.

Books were and remain for me not narratives about life, but means of intensively and vigorously living life. I am moved not only by the content of books, but even by their concrete rectangular objectness. I would gasp from shortness of breath and feel my heart race only from feeling the covers of old books, soaked through with the smell of dust and dampness, which I found in my father's closet. I would spend hours at a stretch in the children's library, not reading but merely sorting through books, touching their sacred bindings. Having picked two—we were allowed only two at a time—I would run home as if driven by some sort of physiological necessity. Often my mother tore away by force a volume of Dumas or Jules Verne, and pushed me out into the street so that I would get some fresh air. Even then I outsmarted her. I usually managed to hide my paper joy under my shirt. It is strange that my father, as much as I remember him, read the same books that I did. He was about forty-five, and read along with me all the adventure stories. Maybe, while reading them, he could escape from the ugly, stillborn official articles which he had either to edit or write himself. Later, together with me, he

courted Hemingway, Salinger, Faulkner. Then, towards the end of the sixties, clutching his weak and torn-up heart, he greedily rustled through typewritten pages of Sakharov's treatise on intellectual freedom which I brought home. Oh father, father, why have you, nailed like a galley slave to your editor's desk, never tried to write at least a few words of truth, since you so loved Tolstoy and Faulkner for their ability to speak the truth?

Maybe this is cruel of me, but I cannot find any other word except "betrayal" when I think of those who were adults during my childhood and adolescence. I felt myself betrayed by my own parents, regardless of the fact that I love them. At least for the sake of their sons, if only at home, they could have assumed some human dignity and honesty. Already a young man, I heard about my mother's father, who was murdered in Stalin's camps outside of Rybinsk. They told me about the arrest of my uncle, my father's brother, when I'd already finished school. I remember only one timid attempt on my father's part to straighten out his spine. In the fifties he received a severe party reprimand for intentionally masking the reactionary nature of Tito's regime in Yugoslavia in an editorial he wrote. Afterwards when the party membership of the newspaper unanimously voted in support of the reprimand, my father, violating the party statute, wrote a letter to the newspaper *Pravda*, trying to justify his "liberal" editorial. Of course, there was no answer from this *Pravda*.

I felt betrayed by my teachers. In the ten years that I spent in school, not one teacher ever spoke a single word of truth about that which was most important, about the tragedy of my fatherland. They raised us exclusively on examples of the bravery and courage of the legendary heroes of our glorious revolution. These pedagogues, like the worst kind of cowards, were affirming their own oppression and were teaching us this most pathetic trade of being little conformists.

I feel as if I even betrayed myself. Why did I believe the teachers and the newspapers? Why did I earn myself the reputation of being the best political informer in my school? Why did I take such a long time, up until my twenty-ninth year, and why did I so painfully approach my first public outcry in defense of my fellow citizens, mislaid behind bars, behind barbed wire, behind walls of psychiatric hospitals, for their ability to think and to express their thoughts aloud?

And it was books, only books that never betrayed me.

One can translate the language of art into the language of sociology, of philosophy, religion, psychoanalysis, ethics. But I think that the element of sensing is the original and most authentic one in art. No matter how intelligent a person may be, each person, nevertheless, begins to experience life through sight, sound, touch, smell. In 1976, being over ten years late, Soviet viewers saw Bertolucci's antifascist film, *The Conformist*. In a country where conformism is the norm of existence, few understood the meaning of this word. On one film poster in the center of Kiev were written the words, "The Conformist." If someone had asked me what this film was about, I would have answered spontaneously that it was about the viscous, disquieting, deathly air of prewar Paris. I could grasp the meaning of this film sensuously, knowing that KGB agents were trailing me and my friends, that my phone was tapped and my room was bugged, that the KGB were spreading rumors of my arrest in a most wearisome manner, that somewhere in another city my mother was afraid for her son, hanging up the phone whenever she heard peculiar clickings, and not being able to control her trembling while opening letters. It was particularly frightening for me to return home at night. I walked through the empty, echoing streets with my coat collar raised. When any solitary car went by, I had only one thought in mind: that it only not stop, that it only not screech its brakes. The rustle of rotting leaves pierced me with a chill, although I pretended that I was chilled by the cool October breeze. I had to gather all my willpower to walk through the gate to my home. At times, when the lights on the gates burned out, I stood a long time before the gaping black hole of the entrance, not daring to take the first step. How did Bertolucci find out about me and about my Kiev autumn in 1977?

But where do films fit in here? I was talking about books. Yes, about books that did not betray me in all those years of betrayal. I was talking about you, poems of Pasternak. The only thing that was ever important for me in poetry was the poetry itself. But how extraordinary that Pasternak not only wrote ingenious poetry, but lived such a dignified, honest, and courageous life during the most terrifying decades in Russia, when it seemed there were only two roads open to people: either the way of the victim or else the way of the executioner, who was aided by countless silent attendants.

I was speaking about you, prose of J.D. Salinger, about your hero Seymour Glass, who taught me spirituality and a refinement of

sensibility. It was together with Seymour Glass that I learned through haiku poetry the art of choosing the right words, the art of being silent, and the art of living.

I was speaking about you, books of Heinrich Böll. I understand that *Billards at Half-Past Nine* and *The Clown* are not only original books, but are also stylistically brilliant. But I will always rate the earlier works of Böll higher. Perhaps the air in his books *And Never Said a Word* and *The Bread of Those Early Years* is somehow closer to me. Perhaps in the accursed, solitary, young, half-starving, tattered heroes of Böll, who think a great deal, who experience life greedily, who wander about such orphaned and decrepit cities of postwar Germany—cities that bear a likeness to the leanness and ugliness of someone who has gone through a lengthy and severe illness—I recognize my older spiritual brothers, or perhaps even myself. Now it seems to me that these heroes of Böll lived on the wind, on the outskirts of cities, under concrete bridges, protected by filthy gray walls that crumble under stains of a stinking dampness which never dries up. I cannot forget the idiot from *And Never Said a Word*, who, unable to articulate clearly, was always mumbling, bubbling, and chirping away. Only now can I understand why this idiot moved and troubled me. By his inability to express himself, he resembled me!

I found out about the ingenious Faulknerian idiot, Benjy, much later. *The Sound and the Fury*, written by William Faulkner in the late twenties, was published in Russian in 1973 or 1974. Somewhere in the libraries the folios from the Stalin-Zhdanov era are still gathering dust. Somewhere among these folios lies *The Sound and the Fury*, slandered as evidence of the marasmus and degeneracy of modern bourgeois literature. How many beautiful books and how many beautiful films, which influenced the formation of tastes and viewpoints of entire generations in the West, were forbidden to be read and seen by my parents, by my older brother, and by myself as well. There was something immoral in the fact that our literary and film critics and scholars for years wrote about Kafka, Musil, D.H. Lawrence, Nathalie Sarraute, Borges, Beckett, Ionesco, Bunuel, Alain Renais, Bergman, Fellini, Peter Brook, books and films that were physically inaccessible to almost all Soviet people. There was something sadistic in releasing only two early films of Fellini, *La Strada* and *Nights of Caberia*, or finally in the mid sixties sprinkling a mere ten thousand copies of a collection of works of Kafka, which contained *The Trial* and about ten other stories, in such an enormous country

as Russia, which chronically suffers from spiritual hunger. And again in 1974, the same number was published of a 200 page or so book of Osip Mendelstam, who was killed in Stalin's camps. I was able to buy this book of the murdered poet only after I arrived in the West. I cannot help but feel ashamed when I think about the three fat tomes of Mendelstam that the Americans published. I am to blame. It is my fault that in my country they kill poets.

It just so happened that almost all the major moments of my life, which demanded from me not only reflection or self-analysis, but direct action as well, were connected in some way with books.

When I entered first grade I finally gained my rights. Already on the second day of school, I came to register with two other first graders at the local children's library. Of course they asked us to fill out some forms. Luckily I knew how to write, and getting smeared with ink from my head down to my heels and having sweated out an hour, I returned our forms to the librarian. Just as in all other Soviet forms, the library forms contained, among other questions, one about nationality. At that time I did not yet know that every person had his own nationality, despite the fact that I used to play "Germans and Russians" with other children in the yard. And for some reason my classmates already knew this, in contrast to myself who already knew how to write. When I came to the line that asked for nationality on my form, they became strangely serious, exchanged glances, and jabbered one after another, "Write 'Jewish'." Not thinking about this for too long, I also wrote in my form "Jewish," just as I had written in theirs. The librarian gave me a penetrating stare and then cautiously said, "Look here, little Igor, you are most likely Russian. You have a Russian name and you look Russian." I looked for support in the eyes of my friends, but for some reason they looked away. They simply evaded my glance and behaved as if they saw nothing and heard nothing. I turned red from desperation. I could feel that something in this conversation was shameful even though I did not understand what. I saw that my classmates felt bad, that any minute they might burst out crying, and then I answered the Librarian, "No, I am a Jew. If they are Jews, then I, too, am Jewish."

I spent my childhood and adolescence in Western Ukraine, in Chernivtsi, which, before World War I, was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and afterwards belonged to Rumania until 1940. I loved my city and was overcome with a feeling of pride every

time I encountered some mention of it in the books I read. In one of the plays of Friedrich Dürrenmatt, the Archbishop of Chernivtsi is listed as a hotel guest. It does not matter to me that my city was useful to Dürrenmatt only as a synonym for the bear's den of provincial ignorance that neighbored Europe. Despite this, I would proudly tell people, "And you see, in Dürrenmatt" Böll also referred to my city in his novel *The Train Was on Time*, and not only in a single word, but in a whole paragraph. In this novel Böll refers to several other cities in Western Ukraine which I visited often: Kolomya, Striy, Stanislaviv. As if hypnotized, Böll's hero is obsessed all the while with the idea that he will be killed somewhere between Striy and Kolomya. I was touched when I read these names. It seemed to me as if Böll wrote his novel solely for my sake. I could well imagine what death would be like in Striy. The magnificent Austrian poet, Paul Celan, was born and lived in Chernivtsi. The city was his impresario and the rough draft for his work. It seems to me that living in Chernivtsi I could not help but love books. Perhaps there is no other city in the Soviet Union that has a street named after Goethe and a park named after Schiller.

While we were driving we did not exchange a single word. We also got out of the car and walked toward the gray building of the KGB in total silence. I found myself inside. We slowly climbed up to the third floor. The one who was the oldest went into the office with me. Another investigator was waiting for us inside. They asked me to sit down. The investigator who was waiting for us stared at me for a long time, then abruptly asked, "Well, Igor Yakovich, what have you stooped to? What is it that led you to commit a criminal act?" He aimlessly dropped on the table before me photocopies of *The Gulag Archipelago*, a collection of social-political and religious-philosophical essays, *Iz-Pod Glib*, published in Paris, and the prewar novel of Vladimir Nabokov, *An Invitation to a Beheading*. "What? You think we are going to play silence games? Start talking!"

They interrogated me for six days. At night they drove me to a hotel encamped in the very center of Odessa. In the hotel I gazed at the merry residents and tourists of Odessa. I listened to their laughter. I listened to the playful voices of the women, the insistent voices of the men. On one of these mornings the car failed to show up, so we set out to the KGB on foot. Again I walked in the middle. People hurried past us on their way to work. Cars and buses flowed by. I

suddenly noticed that someone was looking at me through the window of a bus and my whole being shuddered. An incredible idea crossed my mind that someone possibly understood that down the main avenue of this seaside retreat two avengers were leading a prisoner. The bus passed. We crossed the street and once again the heavy doors of the Committee of State Security closed behind me.

I keep going over and weighing each word that I said during my interrogation. Just as I said then, I would repeat again, "Your fight against books is monstrous. You are monsters." I would also repeat, "I decline to answer all questions concerning my friends and acquaintances." Just as I did then, I would still refuse to play the role of a loyal Soviet citizen, dedicated to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and to the Soviet government. But even so, I was still not consistent to the end. I should not have renounced three books, which I had managed to obtain with enormous difficulty and which I could not help but give to a friend of mine to read. They found these books during a search and confiscated them. I claimed that I never saw them, never read them, never gave them to anyone. I should have simply declined to answer questions about books. "What damned business is it of yours what I read. I don't ask you which books you read. I don't dictate to you what to read, so don't intrude into my life. Somehow I'll manage without you. I'll figure out on my own who is talented and who is not, who is truthful, and who lies." They read Article 62 of the Criminal Code of the U.S.S.R. They threatened me with seven years imprisonment and five years exile. This was not an empty threat. It was only for finding "forbidden" books during a house search that they arrested the outstanding literary critic, Ivan Svitlychny, in 1972 in Kiev, and gave him this horrific sentence. The same sentence was given to another literary critic in Kiev, Evhen Sverstiuk. That same fateful seventy-second year they threw the poets Ihor Kalynets and Vasyl Stus behind bars, and a year later the journalist Valery Marchenko. So this is the payment they got for their professional breadth and scrupulousness, for their love of books, for their dedication to beloved writers! But I was very fortunate. They released me, and a year later, after having herded all my friends and acquaintances and my mother through interrogations, they "advised" me to emigrate from the U.S.S.R.

Oh, how I would love to see, if only from the corner of my eyes, the book storage of the KGB! These book storages are our best, our most valuable libraries, our national pride and our national dis-

grace. I would, like a child, year after year, breathing the dampness of the cellars, ignoring the scurrying about of mice, turn the pages printed by printing presses, by hand, by typewriters. I would turn the pages of truth, of deceptions, passions, despair, hopes, disillusionment, and freedom!

I painfully recollect the furrowed forehead of the major,* while he turned the pages of Nabokov's novel. He was looking for some political intrigue in the pages of this inventive, yet tender and moving, mysterious and capricious author. As I remember the crinkled rag of the major's forehead, I begin to feel sorry for him. What kind of hero can this be with the insane name of Cincinnatus C.?** What is the crime? First of all, where is all this taking place anyway? In Russia, in America, on Mars? Yet all the time he could sense with his spy's nose that there is something in this book that is not quite right and should not be known to any Soviet person.

Placing my hand over my heart, I confess that I see all genuine literature as anti-Soviet. There are sociological, political, essayist books, which openly criticize and attack totalitarian regimes that masquerade under communist slogans. Such books do not hide their anti-Soviet character. But I feel that any good book which acknowledges the human being, its individuality, uniqueness, its right to its own beliefs, feelings, and vision, is also anti-Soviet, because the state dictatorship is directed against the human being as an individual. In the official report of the search carried out in the home of the twenty-two year old Petro Vins,*** a member of the Ukrainian Helsinki Monitoring Group, a confiscated Bible was labelled as anti-Soviet literature. I take offense for the slight done to William Shakespeare. Why did they not confiscate him, too? After all, does *Macbeth* say less about my country than *The Gulag Archipelago*?

*In the Soviet Union, KGB officers hold military ranks.

**Cincinnatus C. is the main character in Nabokov's novel, *Invitation to a Beheading*. Cincinnatus was sentenced to be executed for possessing his own sense of identity, which made him "opaque" in a country where the norm was to be "transparent."

***Since the time of this writing, Petro Vins was allowed to emigrate to the United States shortly after his father, Georgi Vins, was exchanged with four other Soviet political prisoners for two Soviet spies.

In contrast, let us say, to the Germans, we have never had pure philosophy. There were many Hegelians in Russia, but Hegel himself could never have been born in Russia. To have pure philosophers in a country of tyrants and slavery would be too much of a luxury. The books of Russian philosophers are a medley of philosophy, theology, ethics, and belles-lettres. I imagine this might sooner be considered a positive quality than a shortcoming. The uniqueness of Russian literature lies in the fact that ethics has become for it the source of poetry (here I have in mind the painful self-recognition of the Russian classics, their diseased conscience, their compassion for the other). Paradoxically, the surrealistic wonders of Gogol and Dostoevsky are primarily not the creation of forms nor searches for innovation, but passionate gropings for the spiritual and moral foundations of human existence. For the Russian classicists ethics is esthetics.

In one of the first issues of "Literaturnaya Gazetta" in 1978, I read a poem of the well-known Soviet poet, Andrei Voznesensky, a member of the American Academy of Arts, in which he acknowledges his love for Sirin (Sirin is Nabokov's pseudonym). At about the same time, during her guest tour of the United States, the equally well-known poetess Bella Akhmadulina did an interview for the Voice of America, which the Soviet press decries as a slanderous enemy radio station. I listened to this interview from a transistor radio while sitting in my Kiev flat, which was bugged by KGB instruments. The silvery voice of the poetess movingly spoke about the "living wonder," the fascinating Vladimir Nabokov. It is not my fault that under tyranny every single word and every single gesture is tied to ethics. It becomes a matter of conscience. I know that the literary elite in Moscow and Leningrad reads and speaks about Nabokov without fear, and not only about him. Let me make this clearer: the literary elites of Moscow and Leningrad are permitted to keep Nabokov on their bookshelves. It was right before my interrogations that lasted from morning till late at night, when I was threatened with a twelve-year sentence, that the Moscow poet Andrei Voznesensky openly praised a line from his beloved writer, Sirin, a line that was quite safe for him to quote.

Well, I do not believe in this line! From what I can remember, there was only one appearance of Voznesensky's that remains outside of the boundaries of the "permissible." This was a letter to the Writers Union of the U.S.S.R. expressing his indignation at being

denied his regular visit to the United States. I return to the idea of the peculiar interrelatedness of ethics and actions under a state of oppression. How can a person not be ashamed, especially a person who sees himself as the national poet of Russia, of demanding a visa in such an offended manner, when ninety-nine percent of his fellow countrymen cannot even dream of a day-long trip to the West? How deeply Voznesensky wept in his poem, dedicated to the Latin American poet, Obregon Morales, murdered by rightist reactionaries. I also detest the murderers of Morales. I also weep for his death. But I will only believe Voznesensky's tears for Morales when he will say but one word in defense of his fellow countryman, the Ukrainian poet Ihor Kalynets, who was put behind barbed wire simply because he loved books and was true to his conscience. I will believe Voznesensky's tears when he will voice indignation at the actions of camp guards, also his countrymen, who took away and destroyed the translations of R.M. Rilke and several hundred poems, written by Vasyl Stus during his seven years of imprisonment. Who else can be expected to stand up for the right to read and write if not writers themselves?

In October, 1978, I went to a book fair in Frankfurt. I went not as a tourist, but as a political refugee. I first went to see the Soviet pavillion. There were not many people there. A dispatched police unit patrolled the pavillion. I lost track of time and spent about one and a half hours at the fiction section. There were books by Boris Pilnyak,* who was killed in the thirties and is only occasionally mentioned in literary essays since then. There were also books by Aleksei Remizov,** who lived and died in emigration. These books came out in a limited edition when I was still in the Soviet Union

*Boris Pilnyak was one of the most popular Russian writers in the Soviet Union in the period following the revolution. His short stories were published in English translation in a collection, *Mother Earth and Other Stories*, translated by Vera Reck and Michael Green (Praeger, 1968).

**Aleksei Remizov was a prolific Russian writer who died in 1957. His works published in English translation are: *The Clock*, translated by John Cournos; *On a Field Azure*, translated by Beatrice Scott; and *Fifth Pestilence*, translated by Alec Brown. All three were published by Hyperion, 1977.

and were, therefore, very difficult to obtain. Any one of them would have cost a quarter of my monthly salary on the black market. However, in my homeland, I did not have the fortune even to see them. I asked the attendant if I could buy the books there at the fair. She suggested that I order them at a special bookstore in Düsseldorf. She even amiably dictated the address. I wrote it down. I have ordered these books in Düsseldorf and sent them to my friends in Kiev and Chernivtsi.

Contrary to all the laws of poetry, contrary to my own literary passions and tastes, I took my pen in hand with a didactic purpose. I took my pen in hand to remind people that the right to read has withstood centuries of time. Europe has withstood this right despite a multitude of invasions and inquisitions. A writer always writes with the hope that at least someone will read him. I also expect that my own lines will be read. And if you happen to read them, dear reader in Paris, or in Hamburg, or New York, then please be so kind as to stop and think for a moment that while you were reading this, there was someone in an isolation cell of the KGB in Kiev, Dresden, or Sophia, or perhaps in a hotel in Odessa, Brno, or Bucharest, fighting on his own or on her own for the right to read—for your right to read as well. If I will ever be so fortunate that even you will read me, readers of Kiev, Moscow, or Chernivtsi, then remember that I will never forget you, that I will always fight for your, as well as our, extraordinary right—the right to read.

Friedrich P. Ott

ARNO SCHMIDT: 1914-1979

There is a limbo for dead writers, denied blissful oblivion as long as a single work of theirs survives. That, at any rate, was the vision in an early piece by the German writer Arno Schmidt who recently made his long-overdue and posthumous debut here. If Schmidt was right, he may as well settle in—however unhappily—for a long stay down there, in that international corner occupied by or reserved for kindred spirits, such as Joyce, Beckett, Raymond Queneau, and Thomas Pynchon. For Schmidt's recognition as a figure of world literature is only beginning.

Arno Schmidt died in 1979, aged sixty-five, the author of a voluminous and closely interdependent production: captivating and challenging fiction, refreshingly polemical literary essays, and translations, especially of James Fenimore Cooper and Edgar Allan Poe. The two works now available in English are representative of the two main phases of a career which spanned thirty years: *The Egghead Republic* (Boston: Marion Boyars, 1980), a diaristic negative utopia from 1957, and his swan song, *Evening Edged in Gold* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1980), a hybrid, an encyclopedic, dialogized “scenic fairy-tale farce” from 1975. They will serve to flesh out the following, necessarily sketchy, portrait of Arno Schmidt in his significance as a “visual” and an autobiographical artist.

Like all great humorists Schmidt was a pessimist. His world view, forged under the impact of a deprived childhood, was honed under the further abrasion of studying Schopenhauer and of personal experience: Nazi reprisals, the hunger and want of refugee existence which proved especially wretched and prolonged for the fledgling writer. This pessimism gives the *oeuvre* its unity. The protagonists typically are middle-aged or older men, the abandoned offspring of the “Leviathan” or “Nobodaddy’s Children,” as Schmidt titled two trilogies, the latter in deference to William Blake’s hostile world demon. They are isolated men, alienated from the world and, in another sense, from themselves. They reject as futile metaphysical

speculation and hope. One had better stick to one's own resources: reason and senses; they at least are certain, if limited. Thus positivism, close realistic observation, empirical data and psychological materialism (as a function of the inescapably forceful reality of instinct and sexuality) form the kaleidoscopic elements of works shunning the grand vision in favor of the collage. To Schmidt, statistics, lists of names, maps, and photos represent a concentrate of dormant reality; they are the germs for "Mind Games," blossoming forth into a new, metamorphosed reality via the writer's imagination.

In his earlier, pointillistic novels Schmidt gave those portraits of the time which he demanded of every writer. Of course, for Germans, this realist (and didactic) *desideratum* has had a special moral dimension, and Schmidt was indeed among the first to capture, in vivid snapshots, the evil banality of life under Nazism. He has equally focused on the German division, while his pessimistic (and unpopular) view of the fifties, especially of German restorative tendencies and the Cold War, resulted in a number of negative, post-atomic-war utopias that seem no less timely now than they were then. Such works are indeed captivating and challenging enough for their content alone, but they are more! Schmidt's significance lies primarily in his deep concern with the structural and linguistic capabilities of his medium, a concern that dominates in particular those late hybrid works for which language is equally medium and message.

If "formalism" is a dirty word, Schmidt's example may serve to remove the stigma, for his emphasis on form results in greater realism. Unlike pictorial art forms which render reality in sensory images, print as semiotic code is "anesthetic," as John Barth termed this limitation. If Arno Schmidt is going to prove—as he should—a seminal influence on modern writing, it will certainly be as an original "visual" writer who has expanded the limits of his medium. This the German author/critic Martin Walser had in mind when he compared Schmidt to Paul Klee: where the painter tends to the graphic, the writer strives to be visual; both, however, are true artists in that they *evoke* where others merely describe. Schmidt is indeed famous for his evocative power, for endowing words with a maximum of expressive force, through concentration, striking metaphor, and phonetic spelling. His "erotic" relationship with nature has expressed itself in unforgettable, timeless depictions of trees, clouds, and especially the Moon, in all her phases. Still more significant is

his technique of making "conformal reproductions" of reality "through external structure." It is, simply, the application to literary technique of modern insights into processes of mentation: through carefully "calculated" typographic arrangement, Schmidt reproduces, for the reader to follow, the mechanics and dynamics of internal processes, taking up, as it were, where the Joyceans left off.

The *Egghead Republic* is one of these formal experiments. The typography of such works may seem willful at first glance. In actuality, the "dissociative" structure of such diaristic novels is the formal consequence of our memory's function as a "merciful sieve." Typographic arrangement visually plots our discontinuous experience of time. Schmidt also spoke of recollection proceeding not as an epic stream, but as a cataract. It cascades from paragraph to paragraph, italicized lead-in phrases indicating the ledge which disperses the fall, jogging the memory into an associative epiphany which pointilistically unfolds as iridescent word spray. It is a vivid and suggestive method of great flexibility, one which evokes with equal effectiveness the lightning flashes of momentary association and the drawn-out boredom of, say, bureaucratic routine.

Economy as a function of this evocative style is Schmidt's trademark. It is most evident in *KAFF auch MARE CRISIUM* (1960), a formal experiment designed to reproduce the present or immediate past. Paradoxically evident, one may say, considering that the resulting typographic "sieve," text *cum* leading, is, of course, less porous than the memory of older events. For this sieve now must hold also those ephemeral non-verbal gestures in their visual immediacy which words can only grasp in lumbering paraphrase. Schmidt evokes, drawing with the typewriter, as it were: single or multiple question and exclamation marks express querying glances or triumphant gestures and their degree of intensity. Parentheses fix those fleeting moments in which face or movement betray reservation, doubt, anticipation, or they contain pre-verbal sparks of insight, digressions and asides. In the late work the method is playfully expanded, as when a text starts with a curved double row of X's, depicting the barbed-wire fence through which the protagonists enter the stage. In *KAFF* Schmidt was attempting to give as complete a mind-portrait of a person as possible, given his own precondition of the porousness of time (different from Joyce's *Ulysses*). The work occurs in the mind and words of a Schmidt-like protagonist trying to enlighten and entertain his girl by inventing a

story. This story within a story is set off typographically in that both strains of action appear as separate-but-intermeshing columns of print; it depicts the fact that one level of reality determines the other. For we have here a sort of "Portrait of the Narrative I as a Middle-Aged Man," a visual reproduction of the creative process, of the way in which a literary realist à la Schmidt associatively absorbs, reproduces, and metamorphoses reality into "Mind Games," into literature.

Schmidt's creative and critical preoccupations range widely: they include not only the mechanics of cognition, memory, dreams, and other mind games, but also biography, the way in which the subconscious manipulates language, the pathological basis of artistic creativity, and homage to precursors in structural experiment. A rich spectrum, but clearly one with a common denominator: an introverted, self-centered mind for whom "self" is not a given, not an evident starting point, but something elusive, problematic; something that gains artistic significance only as it is experienced through conflict, contrast, opposition (behind all the positivistic gesturing Schmidt was an arch-Romantic). The self-portrait in *KAFF* is not unique. All of Schmidt's works bear an unmistakably personal imprint. He speaks through his *personae*, masks which are congruent, though not identical, images of their creator. Typically, they pose as Ego, reasoning, defensive, self-assuring; minds looking equally typically with casual curiosity at what their appended physique, emotions, and instinctual reactions are up to. This autobiographically motivated concern with the multi-dimensionality of what we simplistically call "person" or "self" became predominant. In the *Egghead Republic*, H-bomb radiation had revealed and absolutized the more hidden facets of the human animal, in mutants such as the "Never-Nevers" and the "Flying Masks" (bestial and sexual libido), and the centaurs reminiscent of Swift's wise and noble Houyhnhnms.

From here it is a logical progression to the polyphonic late work in which the narrative "I" speaks as Ego, Superego, and Id—and with a mocking, humorous personality component which Freud would seem to have ignored. This inner reality, as perceived by Schmidt, thus becomes the object of conformal reproduction. Here also is the reason why these late hybrids from the seventies, *Zettels Traum*, *Schule der Atheisten*, and *Evening Edged in Gold* were published in an untraditional manner, as photomechanic reproductions of the authors' typescript! For it would have proved impossible to typeset the dialogized,

multi-column structure which allows those auctorial voices to speak synchronously in conflict and/or agreement. (At the same time, it was possible to carry over those photos, collages, and other pasted-in components which make these texts such three-dimensional, tactile experiences: they function as asides or comments from the wings of the stage, or “quote” the writer’s original inspiration.)

Among Schmidt’s first literary efforts had been — not surprisingly — a biography, of one of his childhood heroes, the Romantic poet Friedrich Fouqué of *Undine* fame. Later on, Schmidt focused on other literary figures he felt an affinity for: he wrote dramatized radio essays (some of which are being translated), based on his conclusion that in its ideal form biography would consist of “discussion among several partners.” This Jamesian definition certainly also applies to *Evening Edged in Gold*. If *Zettels Traum*, his *magnum opus*, had been, among other things, a gigantic essay on the interdependence between the life and the work of Edgar Allan Poe (another childhood voice), Schmidt now focused on himself, with one significant difference: synthesis takes the place of analysis. The analytical method (foreshadowed in *Egghead Republic*) had grown into the Freudian-Joycean “Etym Theory,” according to which the “inspiration” of the literary artist is primarily manipulation by the Subconscious. In *Zettels Traum* the theory had served to analyze the poet’s obsessions, encoded in “etymys”, i.e. recurrent words, morphemes and set-pieces. (It should be clearly understood that Schmidt, from an awareness of his own pathological condition, was out to demonstrate the extent of humanly possible achievement, in the tension between ignoble impulse and artistic greatness.)

In *Evening Edged in Gold* the theory functions as creative method, as a last — and successful — attempt at resolution and integration. Schmidt presents himself here as one of those artists who finally manage to control *both* of the tyrannical Freudian categories: 1) with creative accomplishment comes autonomy over the Superego. Its tyranny Schmidt’s alienated protagonists had combated all along, attacking State and Church. Now, in his swan song, the auctorial *persona* steps forward *sans* mask, settling accounts with his authoritarian father whom he saw as the centrally negative figure overshadowing his childhood. 2) As for the other tyrant, the Subconscious, its power wanes with the onset of senile impotence; thus it can no longer dictate language, and the literary artist — resigned, disabused, but free — can turn the tables on it, with that new voice, mocking it in conscious, scatological punning. The heavy sexual

word-gaming in *Evening Edged in Gold* strongly suggests that the deposed tyrant in its heyday must have proved a cruelly efficient slave-driver.

This last-completed work thus traces the etiology of a literary *oeuvre* in its themes and preoccupations back to the isolation of an emotionally and sensorially deprived (extreme myopia that went undiagnosed) childhood and lonely youth. His compensatory efforts, voracious and eclectic reading, Schmidt blames for an acceleration of Ego development, along with that of an imagination feeding almost exclusively on a rarefied diet, on literature rather than reality! Young Schmidt removed himself to “cerebral worlds,” the writer does the same, especially in his late phase: neurotic necessity has been converted into creative method, via the “synthetic” imagination of a mind seeking inspiration more selectively now, more from literature and pictures than from reality. (*Evening Edged in Gold* has been shown to be, among other things, the release into dramatic action of the characters visually frozen into Bosch’s *Garden of Earthly Delights*—in a sort of dialectic reversal of the writer’s visual emphasis, one might add.) If there is an element of wish-fulfillment in all this, it is due to this synthesizing esthetic effort. Schmidt, whose works are in some way the “Mind Games” occasioned by his reading experiences, in this last work takes stock of a life spent more in literature than in life. It is no mere subjectivism. Like any true artist Schmidt goes beyond egocentricity to representativeness. In the book the facets of his early Hamburg childhood, for example, have objective value as a sociological document of life in the lowest middle-class European suburb, during the hunger years of World War I and after. Indeed, Schmidt wishes this and other works to be regarded as psychological autopsy. His self-demonstration of the etiology of artistic creation is, far from any exhibitionism, even more selfless than the comparable act of donating one’s physical body for the advancement of anatomical knowledge. Lest the structural relevance of all this be forgotten: Schmidt sums up, comments on, and “repairs” his life in the polyphonic voices of several figures which represent personality levels from past and present: three old men discussing their *status quo* and *ante*, with a fourth figure added for the sake of poetic justice—a budding young writer named Schmidt. He is about to set out on a life ruled over by more benign daemons, a life which shall be more than a reprise of that of his creator-*alter ego*. His first name is not Arno, for we must assume that he will write different books—more’s the pity.

Schmidt's significance lies not so much in original psychological insight, but in applying it to literary form. The typographical and structural plotting of the experience of time and personality is more than formalism. Unlike topographical maps which function as visual replicas of statural realities, Schmidt's texts are not simply blueprints from a literary design bureau. They are both score *and* performance at once. They are artistically successful, convincing experiments which reproduce the mechanics of recollecting, for example, closely enough to result in a maximum of realistic suggestion, in a "déjà vu" recognition by the reader, for whom the fictive reminiscences and experiences thus become his own! To paraphrase the words of one observer: Schmidt's method in its concentration and economy is like a meat extract which may yet flavor many a literary "broth."

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TWO STORIES

Arno Schmidt

GREAT CAIN

1

Ella was still enthusing about “Berlepsch Castle,” making doll’s eyes to match her doll’s mouth, and describing its garden terraces at greater length, when of a sudden she gave a dreamy shake of her doll’s head : “It’s ir-rash-ional.” (Her watchband multiringed like a flatworm. I at once looked over to Ernst — ?; and he affirmed, for only me to see, that this was the latest turn of phrase. Ahwell, now & then we have to have company, so we can realize how good we usually have it; besides, they’ll be on their way again tomorrow.)

And casually let eye & ear stray up and/or about / That most hairy line with towels on it, and crucified shirts; (and a great many empty clothespins : touching, really, these homely mini-gadgets, faithful over the years; “mute” occurred to me too, “genuine-wooden” —, — : well, did something especially exquisite want to surface ? — nope, nuttin’ surfacing.) Geese agagging ? — Aha; Brauer’s little girl driving them. (that is to say, she’s not all *that* little anymore —.) / On every wall of the house caterpillars struggling upwards, toward pupation; and I, promptly turning to Ernst : “Who was it actually that first realized a caterpillar & a butterfly could well be 1 and the same ? Buffon ?”. “Don’t know —” he replied hastily, from over his Eisenmenger, “JUDAISM REVEALED,” the second edition of 1711; “ — that is to say : not *at the moment*. One can look it up anytime”; (this last word very muttered; Footnote-filcher was only half-here again.) / So back to savoring the gaseous pantomime of the approaching low-pressure system : long white cloud shrubbery, dilldolichoid and hemlock-blossomed, lashes filaments carded wool, taking off in flight over Steinhorst; grayish

The two stories by Arno Schmidt, “Die lange Grete” from *Trommler beim Zaren* (© Stahlberg Verlag Karlsruhe, 1966), and “Grosser Kain” from *Kühe in Halbrauer* (© 1964 Stahlberg Verlag GmbH, Karlsruhe) are translated by John Woods and published by permission of S. Fischer Verlag GmbH, Frankfurt am Main.

raggs were already anxious to scurry in from the west; ("sticky this afternoon" had been issued as the watchword. So be it.) / Out of malice one ought to put the question to Ella : just who was this Berlepsch of hers; that 'd make her red slit gape nice and wide. (How did Pythagoras put it ? : "Sire no children by women who wear gold !"; and she had several teeth made of it. (Though, to be sure, He apparently maintained nothing except things like that : "Piss not at the sun !"; "Avoid, above all, whatever has a black tail !"; "Touch the earth when it thunders !"; and so on : junk not even worth discussing, the whole of antiquity !).).

As a table-base the spare tire ! Verily, there's something to be said for these VW CAMPERS. / Ahwell; Ernst has been making good money for the past couple of years; and the "filler-upper" on a big newspaper doesn't have it easy, either — I immediately raised (in homage, so to speak : "To the Spiritus, Rector !") my pale, murky tumbler to him (yckh : "grapefruit juice," oh rocks !). But then he once again took such a good grip on the soft gray slice of bread by its glassy brown crust; and pressed the butter so firmly into its pores as if it belonged there; spreading the brown strong-smelling jam over it thicker and thicker —, — (and the look I was giving him grew considerably more relaxed : You will be surprised, friend, at how cathartic that is. And diaphoretic : just spread away.). / Cookies all round, "GOLD MARIE" & "PITCH MARIE," (these latter with chocolate; that's why). Cigarettes & tobacco; ("tabarettes & cigacco"). The chestnut in Ella's hand (above it Ella's wildandwoolly armpit). : "Like a smoldering coal."; (I meant the chestnut; Paula, however, immediately jealous : "You two have still got the mowing to do today, you know.").

And further breakfastatic exchange of news from the past quarter of a year during which we hadn't seen one another. / We told about our hedgehog couple in the shed. — : "He still alive ?"; Ernst, softly & in English, (as if he were afraid the hedgehog might hear him; or understand German.) / Then about the "Bird in the Chimney." At first the very noticeable, loud peeping; hour after hour. Then the difficult task of localization : ? — : clearly audible only in the kitchen; around the house outside, not at all; (Paula did that part beautifully, heart-flutters & soot-anxiety.) Finally, however, he had ventured through the opened damper : hop-hop — and "brrr!" out through the kitchen window (wide open, of course, by way of precaution), and into that mixture of leaves & country air that was his by rights. (But moving on now to Meaningful Generalizations, the conversation we held later on with the chimney sweep :

how they frequently find dead birds there, especially owlets, strange to say. Ernst made a note of the fact; Ella's lips formed the requisite pucker of empathy.)

And retaliated with the exciting account of that Irish Night o' New Moon; when through the busslet's window (left open on account of the humidity), a felonious hand had come feeling its way along : — : first twice on his nose. Then on Ella's left, practically exposed, breast. And she, the resolute damsel, without uttering 1 word, had fumbled in the toolbox for the pincers — listened — right : a fourth round of groping. At which she had taken hold of 1 finger of the party in question with aforesaid utensil : ! . — All quiet; Nothing said by nobody. — Only from outside there came something like deeper intakes of breath. Trampling. And a penitential wheeze now & again. (And all the while she's squeezing ! Charming. But for that sort of thing one probably needs a doll's conscience. — Nevertheless I admit I now viewed this ingenious mobile home with greater interest : at 2 meters 15, how had it ever made it through our entrance gate ! ?).

2

: “Hey look at that !” —

— ? — ! : for real; a small advertising-Zeppelin floating ever so merrily and silverfishily along the farthest rim of the vapor forest. “DUJARDIN or TRUMPF, aut-aut !” (But even with binox it couldn't be made out. One could, however, see individual trees, like puffs of smoke : with hat-shaped heads, plus some like champagne glasses, troops of tapering brushes; they stood, in all likelihood, on the floor of their ocean of air, swaying back & forth in sync. Nor could that “transitional low” be very nasty : otherwise They would never have ascended in that thing in the first place.) / The tall television tower, a spindly-red stripe, was clearly visible as well. At first Ernst mistook it for your basic guileless factory smokestack : ? : “Listen, friend, that's the tallest piece of construction in Central & Western Europe !”; me, indignant. And he, impressed : “Where exactly ?”. I showed them all the spot on my 1:100,000 map : “East of federal highway 4; near Bokel.” / ? / And, with autopedic nimbleness, elaborate the plan for a drive-over. / ? / Till the ladies gave their approval; and set to clearing the table more quickly. (A tire as a base; what won't them students come up with next !)

Meanwhile Ernst & I by ourselves; smoking. / He certainly

does *not* have it easy ! As “filler-upper” on one of the largest newspapers ? He must regularly provide

- a) the column “FIFTY YEARS AGO” (the “Panther” pounces on Agadir. / “TWENTY YEARS AGO” on Stalingrad. / “TEN YEARS AGO” ? : Ah-ah-ah already up that creek).
- b) the “Letterbox” ; 90% bogus, 10% the genuine-idiotic inquiries from “readers,” (always the same “strata” by the way : cantankerous retirees, regulars at some pub or other, high-school seniors already despairing of ever seeing themselves in print any other way) : “Why is TANTALUM called tantalum ?” / : “Are salted herring hung in cherry trees effective against thievish magpies ?” / : “Where does the brandname “MONDAMIN” come from ?” (And the stoic-inane answer : “E. Kr. from D. — From an Indian word; ‘Grain of the Great Spirit,’ that is, maize. Your friend has won his bet.”).
- c) Or, something that occurs on the average of a half-dozen times a day, the editor-in-chief calls up : “Quick, a filler with 6 lines : make it snappy !” (Whence edifying Tartar canards, à la “Child bit by Camel”; “HOLOFERNES, Inventor of the Mosquito Net,” cf. Jdt 13:9; “Willi Brandt nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize ?”).

As a result of which Ernst was condemned to devoting himself to the most motley kinds of reading; forced on principle to read pencil-in-hand, to affix every bit of foolishness to an index card, and then to slip it into the appropriate stockpile folder. (They carried curious labels : “LEARNED WIND; a) schmaltzy, b) ancient, c) slightly risqué — CAVE !” / “ADJECTIVES CONTRA GENTILES” — it was after all an “independent” paper, ergo Christian Democrat; (and *what* a Social-Democrat He once had been, around 1930 when we were in school together ! Ah well; back then there still was a Social-Democratic Party.) / And as noted, “5-LINERS; 6-LINERS; 7-LINERS” — I was once allowed to visit his “Cave of Winds” : *Never again* !). He had trained all his closer acquaintances likewise to collect pertinent items, and to share them with him, for despite his labors he was forever short of material; I could therefore predict his next question. : “You got anything ?” (I was already pulling out the sheet of paper with my mini-finds.)

: “‘MASAK,’ Reversal of Circumcision.” — “Can that be done ?” the lecher asked in initial delight; but then at once started to rock his

head thoughtfully : “‘LEARNED WIND, slightly risqué” I heard him murmur considering; “Hm. — Well, hand it over.” / “2 kinds of alien spirits can, in the opinion of the rabbis, invade the bodies of living men; either those of the babylonian tower-builders or those of the wicked folk who perished in the flood.” — “Well, maybe.” / But now at last I had touched his heart of stone; and it was indeed a fine item, “THE AUTOMOBILE’S FATAL PROGRESS IN 1908” : “During the past year, in the entire German Reich 141 persons were killed by automobiles; of these 12 were drivers, 22 persons riding as passengers, and 107 third parties. One can see from this that it is less dangerous to ride in an automobile than to walk a street populated with them.” (41,727 cars and trucks registered at the time. And with 1 smiling moment of silence we honored the good-old-days, when grandpa ran down grandma : 141, tut-tut !).

: “Is A-1 SAUCE permitted on Fridays ?” — “Are you crazy ?!” he asked in astonishment. I fell into simple, sublime silence; and then he too grew more serious, having recognized the gordian nature of this seemingly harmless question. And moved his shoulders with increasing uneasiness : “Oh-oh. — Pffff : listen, don’t mess with *that* !”. He formed one hand as an orator’s claw, looked into it, and shaped his pronouncement — : “If a coward wants to prove his courage nowadays, then he protests against the atom-bomb-in-general. That’s so chic & safe that you can ask in the most casual small-talky tone of voice : “Ah, so you’re against the bomb *too* ?”. But it’s best to say nothin’ — nohow when it comes to “religion” — or to “christianity,” that is” he added more precisely. And, fully out of sorts now : “Besides, on independent papers there are special chaplains for that sort of thing : no sir.” He raised himself up ponderously, (was the elderberry jam starting to work ? Hardly this soon.); stretched his elbows unaesthetically, and pointed with his chin, above it a yawn, toward the corner of the house, around which there now

“Girls, you can’t go like *that* — ”, Ernst & I, in anxious chorus. “At least take a sweater along, the sky’s turning overcast.” (Quite apart from the fact that they really were exposing a great deal : if Paula took cold afterwards, I could make a tea again.) They cast a confused look upwards. Then at themselves. And had seen through us. Paula replied simply : “You’ll still have to do that mowing.” —

3

Was Ernst ever driving fast again ! — I had the feeling I was being telegraphed. “95”; he said, equanimously. / A droll feeling, really, sitting here in this thing : the two of us up front; the ladies nonchalant and mondaine (“GRAIN OF THE GREAT SPIRIT,” one ought to have a bottle of it along) in the little metal parlor behind us; (on the return trip I definitely must snoop around back there, too).

: “Left or right here ? Highway’s coming up.” I for one saw nothing of said highway as yet; but drivers have their own private criteria for telling when they’re approaching intersections, or other spots where witches hold their dances : “Turn left at the GREAT CAIN.” “Unusual name” he said disparagingly, (and to my joy had to slow down considerably). “Well afterall, not everyone can be named ‘Ernst.’” “That’s true,” he admitted; and brightened up, making the same remark I had heard frequently at this turn : “Judging by which, not far to paradise, right ? The scene of the well-known incident.” And I, with gravity & wit (likewise practiced several times over : one cannot plagiarize oneself) : “Quite right. Where even nowadays chauffeur Cain, having spotted his pedestrian brother Abel . . . ,” (and, allegorically, “socks it to him” with a few quick thrusts of my hand). “Cain was far and away the more interesting fellow.” he pronounced testily, (using, consciously one would hope, one of those West-Germanisms : “far and away”; “to confess oneself to be”; “a genuine predilection”; oh my yes). We were racing (not “tracing”) our way again now at such a tempo that the leaves along the edge of the road did wobble and bob ! : “Anything else ? !” he inquired, not without trenchancy; and: “You ought to ride with our local reporter; that ’d give you just cause for searching your soul.” And after a while, fully disdainful now : “Lord, are you folks here in the country ever behind the times !” And at ever fuller tilt, onward we went, Nobodaddy’s children, with elan & fiery steps, “THE AUTOMOBILE’S FATAL PROGRESS IN 1961” ! — ? : Oh hell, that too ! Music had started up behind us : Lovely-Ella explained how the new portable worked. (All that was lacking was for them to play “Nearer my God to Thee.” So you could get in a real Titanic frame of mind.)

“And now bear right.” he said, just to make sure, on the far side of Sprackensehl : “By the way, that’s by Robert Kraft, the ‘ADVENTURES OF DETECTIVE NOBODY,’ isn’t it ?”. While the last village flowed by on both sides, with sensible slowness. The last house : gray wooden swords set out around it, pointing upwards. “HEATH ICE” !

/ "I'll beat your barge into a pram !" I screeched into his Judas' ear, as he was about to step on the "gass" (or whatever), moving along the narrow, empty strip of asphalt — quite obviously newly paved : "We have to keep a look-out, see, for where a lane turns off to the right !". He muttered his obedience; (or, contrariwise, obediently muttered : it must be just *too* difficult, with 34 horse power at your feet.) / : "Stop ! There !". (And keep to the right of the balk, my son; 'tis my good advice.) / Climb out. / : "Be so good as to roll up the windows, huh? — You'll never learn." (And full of importance "checks it out himself." And locks the doors.)

4

Up the path : no way you could lay your head back as far as would have been necessary here ! (Since you were also forced to regard the gray-blue of the celestial canopy in the process : "Well ? Wouldn't those sweaters feel good now ? !". They emitted, however, 'tis the custom of women perhaps, only a unison-scornful "Pffff —"; and just for that Sir Whirlwind was permitted to link arms with them "straight away !".)

The cement blocks, to which the cables had been anchored, were like large sheds sunk into the earth. Each with its acre of sand, surrounded by a fence 2 m high. "Well, yours isn't all *that* much lower, either." (Ernst; it had the unequivocal ring of disapprobation.) / Flat-roofed technical cottages of clinker-colored clinkers; here & there on the clean sand-strewn ground lean twins of young birch, very attractive and austere, in a tastefully sparse sort of way — one realized all was not as it seemed only from the fact that there were things like large tin lunch-boxes hanging on many a wall. Protective link-fencing here as well, of course; (and I mean of the thickest, most expensive gauge; I knew all about it; afterall, as Ernst had hinted just now, I had only recently put up a new fence myself.)

But the main attraction was & ever would be him, *HIM* : *THE GREAT TOWER* !!! —

Way at the bottom the skimpy road round cement base : "Hardly 1 hand above the ground ? !". "Listen, that goes down deep enough," Ernst cautioned out of the fullness of his gazetteer's erudition : "With the weight it's supporting, there's a good 20 meters of it ! And cone-shaped, too, I'd guess : growing larger at the base." ("Gives himself some stinking airs at times"; but for once even he had

no explanation for why the tower itself had to taper off at the base, like a carpenter's pencil.) / It was pointless to ask the 3 visible babylonian tower-builders : as soon as they noticed we were taking pictures, they immediately started carrying on megalomaniacally with their long white metal canister. (One of them even had the nerve to approach the grid, and "warn" us : not to take pictures at the moment; it was a matter of top-secret components ! Sundry warts, living sociably together, on his cheek. And the two harelipped spooky bastards across the way at once carted off their crap amid such gesticulations and flapping of wings as if they were the invested priests of TELEVISIUS. — "The fraud —" grumbled Ernst agreeably; and clicked & shot away with vigor; he relished it when someone took his job seriously. Not me : I only have to hear the word "*SECRET* !", and right away I always feel just like I did under the late Hitler : The more bankrupt the government, the more "secret" it has to be !).

"Well — : 2 meters; 2 twenty —"; the diameter of the tower that is. (And it had to be very hollow : you could make out 2 damned dungeony little doors in it, topped by semi-circle arches, heavily riveted, in triple and quadruple rows. Nor had rivets been spared generally. And the skinny, cocky-contorted ladders that climbed up to those doors ! Into that fiery red tube : Inside it !). / We looked at one another, Ernst & I; (what the ladies were thinking we couldn't say; of the well-yes, the "converse" perhaps ? — Red-skinned & hollow : ought one not more correctly speak of a *TELEVISIA* ? Inside doubtless the winding staircase, cunningly emaciated, wandering up & down the 350 meters, like at Piranesi's : whoever had a key could, provided he were so inclined, walk right out onto one of the 4 circumferential pulpits, (it was too high for leaping off anyway), and, in muezzin fashion, all *ABU LAHAB*, all "Father of the Flame," call out to the federated folk : "O Come to the Quiz, ye faithful; hie ye to the tube !"). / *CHANNEL TWO* : "Do you know that tryptich by Eberhard Schlotter ? With the text by Dr. Mac Intosh ?". "I don't know names like that on principle.", was his initial retort, officious-bigoted; then, however, inofficiously softer : "Sure I own the portfolio." —

The craziest thing about it was the still undisturbed landscape ! ("Crazy" in conjunction with this monster here.) When you had once turned your back on it, sandy paths suddenly ran away from you; so lonely, that should you "take to one," it's guaranteed you could still

find your own footprints 3 days later. Merry-indigent little farmer's-woods on both sides : (they never ever gave anything a chance to grow, did the Messrs. Granger; more than enough of them in our village alone who never bought an ounce of coal — “but they all own a TV of course !” — on the contrary, during the winter they dispatch half a grove through their sooty stoves in the most invegetane-barbarian fashion. “The other half in summer then : in point of fact, axe & saw ought to be available only with a ‘license’ !”). Fields (how do Bindings & Company put it ?) “swelling lightly on out into the blue distance.” (And, even bluer, far off to the rear, in the east presumably, some “fell” or other.)

: What was buzzing away so impertinently ? ! — Ernst turned to me again now reproachfully : “I told you so : you *are* allowed to drive your car up to it, you see.” But I, shaking my head : “Nooo you're not. That's some guy from “Behind the Curtain.” A technician, I'll bet. — Aha : see ? !”. For the fellow in question had the key to one of those galvanized enclosures; he diddled, glanced cursorily-intensely our way; (and then by way of decoration took an even longer time locking up : you, too, my friend. They were all visibly grateful for the change of scene we provided.) / And nevertheless glances sliding down, nefarious-&-nimble. And we approached playfully — ; — . For behind the privileged gentleman a disembarkation was in progress, a chic curio, (our wives likewise sauntered over inconspicuously) : a white-violet burnous, a ditto shawl, (for up here, on this naked rise at the foot of the tower, it was drafty as a barn !). “Odalisque” I heard Ernst mutter : her skin pale reddish & chapped; a nose for picking up distant odors; mother-of-pearl buttons that seemed to grow from her wrists; she set her eyes for distance & snow, and submitted herself for approval. (And more and *more* wrinkles, the closer you came ! Even Ernst quoted now his disappointment : “‘Ah well, a fair maid perhaps, when trimmed.’” And then the little boy, who also climbed out of the car, did a few rounds as go-between, and then crowed : “You'll have to wait, Mom; your husband isn't ready yet.” (“Irrational —” I heard Ella murmur critically.)

And back to the camperette. / Ella, awakening with the unlocking : “How late is it, Ernst ?” : “12; on the dot.” (“Pan sleeps.” And we chat away.) / And puffy (to all appearances, hollow) clouds, beneath which we swiftly drove on.

5

: "In *this humidity* ? ! " —

But Paula was inexorably gentle; Ella quietly amused; (and we were looked upon sadistically by them both, as with tucked-up shirts, tacky little bellies and disgruntled sheep's faces, we took up our positions — helpless as once upon a time before the "recruiting board" : a man ought to bang his fist on the table !). "Oh come on, Ernst, no point in that." But they didn't let us go at it yet by any means; first the two Xanbiddies provided us with several of those well-loved little lectures.

: "A *good* mower gets through an acre a day." (Paula. Since we were dealing here with a quarter acre and 2 men, the application was self-evident; we kept an impenitent peace, and merely bored around in our navels.)

: "And please-please don't harm those salmon-colored dahlias ! : They're *so* sweet." (Ella : as if we had intended to. (That is to say, if They kept on pestering us here much *longer* . . . !). A quick turn of the tables.)

: "And what do *you-two* intend to do meanwhile ? !". But they were perfectly irony-proof. "Us ? We'll lie on the chaises longues." (Ella, innocent; so totally matter-of-course.) "We'll cook you guys a pudding." Paula; by 1 decisive hint — I can speak federal German, too ! — the more understanding.

Alone at last. / "A pudding ?". Ernst, nibbly; but I just shook my head dolefully : "Dregs left over from ricing the elderberries, then cooked with sago : one eats, but one does not prize it. — That is to say, tastes do vary." I added hastily, so as not already to smother his ardor for work, which didn't appear excessive as it was : "Go get the scythe out of the shed on the right." (And He actually went ! — I first waited until he was halfway inside; and then, in an inappropriate attack of charity, called after him : "But don't knock down that wasp nest with the handle ! Firstly, Paula sets great store by it. And the secondly I assume you know about all on your own." He uttered Cromwell's curse, 'tis true; was, however, just as I had figured, too much a coward to make the decisive turnabout. And happily brought the creature out into the dingy light of day.)

As a child of the asphalt he was morbid enough to be fascinated by the tool — god be praised : its ash handle; the whetstone (besides, I was fiddling away at that murderously long blade *so* enticingly — smoothly, that he immediately beamed chubby-checked, WE

BEARERS OF THE SCYTHE !, and strode forth, legs in an atavistic spread.) / The rake (made of alderwood !) ? : “Huh-uh, Ernst. Leave the raking-up to those lovely reapers, ‘from August weary.’”; (and at once there came a swallow-like, confirmatory twittering from the elderberry bushes. “Did you know that swallows never nest on Bismarck monuments ?”. He didn’t know it. “You folks from below the Main don’t know much of anything.”)

“First cut a border all-the-way-around — ”; I demonstrated, (and he walked alongside delighted : Just wait, your little bell will toll shortly !). I entertained him as best I knew how with bucolica : “Did you know that piglets can get sunburned, too ? : On their ears !” : Don’t need to know that,” he said in rebuttal; “What do you suppose we have an agriculture column for ? There’s enough squabbling about “jurisdiction” on the editorial staff as it is. — What’s the purpose of all these wooden pegs in the yard ?”. “Oh. Paula’s probably planted something there — ”; I tried to keep my voice as void of expression as possible, (all the while performing an egg-dance at the spot in question; with lips badly bitten and seethings in my breast, I had the urge to drip from every sweat pore; now I struck a “Lovely Stone” so that you could hear it 3 versts away : ! (and, of course, this resulted in my having to whet away at the nick it had produced for a good 5 minutes)).

Sooo. / Stand there & pant; (and with a hand at your mouth so your tongue can’t hang out : if I survive this once more, why praise be !). Imploringly to Ernst : “Haven’t you got anything in the car ? You know what I mean : ‘It refreshes the palate, sweetens the breath, and spreads good cheer’ — ?”. He puckered his lips, free of bias, and fetched something. / But : “You, too, Ernst ?”. Yes; him too. / “Hopefully the pictures ’ll turn out,” he said anxiously; “Theoretically — that tower might emit some kind of “rays,” mightn’t it ?”. Theoretically, yes. And the drink had indeed so refreshed my palate, that I could swing the scythe about with more sovereign grace : DEATH, THE FRIEND !; (Ernst delivered an appropriate eulogy over every third-fourth swath). / And another break after a back & forth ambit. — “How many laps like this ’ll be necessary, did you say ?”. 25. He wanted to sire a pensive look; but instead he had to strike a blow at a horsefly thirsty for editorial blood (and in the process gave himself such a swat on the testicles that, unrestrained as ever, he let out a roar ! “That’s a chunk of life, too, an insect like that” I reminded him buddha-assisi-cally; but in vain, the throbbing pain had most likely been too great.)

“Huh-uh, Ernst : despite which you can do the mowing. Just back & forth; ‘boustrophedonic,’ very simple.” / Now *I* walked alongside, now *I* babbled on. / Laughed like a frog for glee, as the old pettifogger — now why had that word just occurred to me ? — lopped off half a dahlia bush first thing : “Ernst, *you’ve* got to take the whole blame ! : you’ll be taking off again tomorrow; I’m the one who’ll have to grin & bear it.” Which on the one hand he accepted; on the other, however, he feared Paula, and not without cause. With heaving breast after the very first round. (As I noticed that he was secretly eyeing the bright headscarves in the potato patch across the way, I quickly went and got him-us the binoculars so as to keep him-us in a good mood.)

First the revolving rambling reaping rotor; beside it the petty bumping : foxyred face with whitish bristles; a hide that would have bent the stinger on a hornet; and raised his arms in a priestly gesture to which he hadn’t the least right, (the commanding bark of his pipes that doubtless accompanied this could, happily, not be heard this far. Diaphragmatic rabble. — “You could tell them : “Sharpening a new pencil on Wednesday brings misfortune at home” : they’re so stupid that 300 years later a folklorist could come along and, awestruck, collect that as ‘wisdom.’” / And back. And forth.).

: “Break !”. He screamed now uninhibitedly; directed his backside to the orient and gave a gaseous formation clearance for departure (all that elderberry jam, right ?).

: “Hell, like in a POW-camp !” (He meant in fact my pretty new fence; to keep him in the mood, however, I first handed him the bottle. Then the binox; (and right away he focused lecherously on the 6 potato diggers in their furrows, nudipedalia with milkmaid arms). / “‘Tis no mask she’s wearing — grown ebon rather fro’ the sun.’ ?” He nodded agreement, and continued to level in musingly on those colorful taut rears. / “Listen, do they ever carry on conversations sometimes ! Once, hidden behind a bush, I eavesdropped for 5 minutes — : the army’s a nunnery in comparison !”. (Here, as if she had understood us, there arose a young tan gazelle from out the local fertile plain; revealed herself a saucy brat of 14 years at most, who looked our way — and at once, with resolve, tucked her skirt still higher, tormented by her own sex. Ernst ogled her all the more; (“forest-primevally sansculotte, having been seduced by the Zeitgeist”); “How would that be, Ernst ? : ‘TO THE WOODS, TO THE WOODS’ !”. Naturally something morbid-letterboxy occurred to Him at once : “The French Republic enacted a law on September 9, 1792,

whereby every youth 15 or older, every maiden 13 or older, was qualified for marriage." "Qualified" sure. Whereas I, at my age, (and since he was whispering so) : "Come on, let's move back & forth instead.)/ But then I couldn't resist the notion any longer. — "Don't you want to swap for tonight, Ernst ? : You two can sleep in the house; we in the mini-bus ? !" (And he honored it with a nod; giving the frailties of the "flesh" their due. Thought, too, of the pleasures of variety; and added his crowning-canonizing endorsement : "Agreed.") —

"Come on, see it through : sex times more back and forth !". / For Helios was already showing us his rear wheels. The potato maids, their chassis fully dusted, stomped homeward. And naught but twilight fruits-of-reading had begun to run through Ernst's mind : "'AVALON' : an eternal sunset behind apple trees in bloom. In the midst of a meadow there, IDISTAVISO, the 'Fountain of Forgetfulness.' 'Heroic shades' slouching about, blown-glass hollow, there in the English ray grass." — : "Sure would be nice —"; me, gasping hunchbacked sweat-drenched bent-over cataract-eyed deafened crescent-shaped sector-scything autochthonous

. and jerked myself up ! Such female screeching behind me : "Be-care-full ! The sloe-tree-Carl !!" — / And whip back the homicidal tool : ! ! ! ! . / And for starters gape stupidly at it; where the dark red ran from the tips of the toes of my right foot. : all five-ven properly slashed ! (And only then did there come a fine, most scalping pain. My nylon sox were shot to — uh—hell, too.). / An opinion poll produced the following results. — ELLA : " — perdu. — : Irrational ! —". PAULA : "You see; 1 of the branches is gone ! — I'll put some SAGROTAN in the water for you.". ERNST: "When a person's beheaded the torso just keeps on vomiting sometimes." — My first urge was to say something. But then I pictured said bubbling of blood & barf by the beheaded. — And, limping decoratively away, made my exit; into the bathroom.)

6

(It certainly looked snazzy, that bright red bathroom-line, wrapped around my 5 toes now. (And that 'd be wrapped around them for some time to come !). And the LYSOL-ersatz stung : well, go ahead and sting ! / But it had its good side too : Ernst had to finish the mowing. I was nursed-indulged-pitied. (And the inevitable evening ring-toss and badminton would be spared me for the next 14

days — grimly rejoicing, I stuck the BAND-AID on tighter. (Although naturally the thought of “blood-poisoning” occurred to me as well, damn the amputation & pension ! — Ohwell : wouldn’t be all that bad if you could chuck this job shit !) — Sure-stick. No-stick. Stick it !). —

And lie “suffering” in the chaise. (While the other three, in a trigon, bounced & badmintoned — Ernst with such charley-horsed gracelessness that my eyes would have liked to bug out for pure meanness: serves him right !). / Then — as is probably inevitable when the barometric pressure is on the rise — the great wheel of the stars made its appearance, “MISTER ORRERY”; head of the local planetary system — I instinctively thought of the TV-tower again : might there be some connection there ? / And the folks-yonder hopped & skipped. Over a freshly mown meadow, “across which now the cooling evening ran,” and dallied among themselves.)

Gathered, taking deep breaths, about the couch of the notable-invalid (and there came a surreptitious odor, a panaromatic mixture, of female sweat & the beginnings of hay : handyhill, valleywards, belly-down, a curly rise to the rambler : fine.) / And distant rumblings? — I provided testimony : “Strauss & some of his contemporaries. The artillery ranges of Munsterlager & Unterluess.” (And heard Ernst testing how it sounded : “‘You are mistaken. ‘CANONICUS’ in no way corresponds to the erstwhile rank of corporal in the heavy artillery; there is in fact no such rank in the new Federal German Army.’” — Idiotic; & lucrative : this con- and de-scription of us-All !). —

And offered the three youngsters — I was afterall & most unfortunately the eldest ! — the binoculars : ! / : “You can see it every evening from here.” — : “Not there : on across the horse pasture there ! — Adjust the focus a bit, kids.” — And then at last they spotted it too : the 2 red lights one above the other; far off to the east-northeast. / — : ?. — : ! : “The TV-tower of course ! From this morning. — . — Probably for airplanes.” (And they gazed, the 3 youngsters, moved by memories, mnemotechnical in the alraunic twilight.) —

Plus the hasty eating of the “pudding.” / Ernst & I swap several furtive glances : !. (Apparently each has already informed ‘His’ during 1 stolen minute — strangely they offered no resistance, “pudding-like” in fact.) / Ergo they enter the house. / And we the vee-double-you camper : first the curtain moved in submissive greeting; (as we opened the door. Or was it only the draft ?). / “Say. — Just look at

that. —” Paula greedily felt the leather sheets that had been spread; and EVERYTHING in general ! (Were the pincers lying ready at hand ?). / When you closed your eyes, you saw nothing but green grass with clover — : — —).

7

White arc of fog stretched above. Ass in bed. (Damned narrow this bed-frame here, extolled as especially “roomy” ! It was all the same to Paula of course; right afterwards she made a soft mattress out of me, and fell asleep.)

THE OWL THAT COMES EACH EVENING flew about our tin-smithy here too, with a thin “hoo-hoo!”); (and “Hoho !” and “Bassa Manelka !” and “Seest thou, good landlord ? !” and “Adieu !” and “Faretheewell, good landlord !”). And in the house those two were using the john & bath with more vengeance than the prodigal son; (and now & again 1 wee voice repeated sweet & businesslike “It’s irrational.” — “And from afar they saw the Grandduke come ariding”; I had to chuckle a bit; and as my ribs jiggled, Paula muttered in her dreams, (the wife of the railroad man nextdoor, who always waxes her floors too slick, slipped and fell on them yesterday herself; and cracked 2 ribs against the foot-end of the marital couch ! : mine jiggled again now; and Paula muttered a while longer (in the infinite distance the lugubrious dragon howl of a freight train : red-skinned, long & stiff, the tower-today : cables, tightened down over you, like cages, (a sometime “fellow partisan,” named “Ernst” nowadays, did indeed want to hide me from my “pursuers” ! (and signs of danger were indisputably present : wasn’t 1 warted face directing something my way ? ! Wasn’t there something creeping all-about-me, white & completely camowflaged ? (first I quickly scribbled my name in the snow beside me : so that at least Something of me might remain on earth ! (Ernst was already shoving me ahead of him now through the treacherously low door, (which at once grew even narrower ! Didn’t Someone from the Co-alition already have hold of my foot ? ! : “IT SEEMS TO ME THAT SOMETHING HAS WOUNDED MY FOOT ! !” : ROLAND DÄUBLER ! (But Ernst slammed it rattling behind me. He thought nothing of it, & followed me ! And I began, laboriously, to climb the winding spun yarn of the hollow stairs, (and the wire snare grew ever more metallic and tight — no air — : “JUGURTHA : JUGURTHA ! !”))))))). —

8

(The very first thing next morning I had to offer Paula printed proof that it had *nothing* to do with a *woman's name*. / Ernst, mockingly : "Old-fashioned nervous-nelly ! — You'll never make a decent rider of the highways." Ella, teasing : "Bye-bye !". / At first I wanted to protest : ME ? : old-fashioned ? ! — But then I decided 'twere better to spare myself the nervous energy; afterall, everything is possible !).

TALL GRETE

"Back when I was born," the aged man said, "this was still a realm all to itself, you see." From his seat on the grass he pointed very slowly all about him, as far as to where the jagged pine bordered the horizon : "It was all still very different then—"; I understood with no trouble at all : better; and nodded expressively to keep him in the mood. "Back then you had other folks than these slickers they turn out nowadays by the dozen—" he wearily stretched his worn-out legs and arranged them carefully on the heather"— and this here most likely belongs to it too : you see, I'm sitting on a grave, young fellow !" Now I can bear nothing with less grace than 'young fellow'; afterall, I've arrived at 45 with indifferent honors, and even if I sometimes look absurdly young . . . so I chewed a while longer on that bite, whereas he was already proceeding thoughtfully:

"I was still a lad when Tall Grete first showed up around here, in the middle of her little herd of sheep, and we children would have sworn those animals had to be people that had been bewitched, they used to act that clever and self-assured. Each had its own name that it answered to; she would carry on reasoned conversations with them, too; and sometimes at night there were long discourses as to who would be allowed to lie closest to her this time : you see, she never entered a house, but slept in thickets, warmed by her animals. Of a morning, when she wanted to get up, she would call the big old ram — Hermann was his name, I believe — who came over, and lowered that mighty head of his, whereupon she grasped hold of his horns, and with a simple raising of his head he pulled her up. If she would leave her animals for even a moment, they would start right in bleating in the most woebegone fashion; and when she came back then, they would all crowd around her and rub their heads on her hand.

"Yes, she was feeble-minded, I suppose; but for the most part very good-natured; and — unlike others of her kind — not in the least fond of finery or gaudy outfits : she always wore her old shepherd's hat, the brim turned down; a durable moss-colored frock, her blanket about her shoulders; in her hand a long staff, which she used in the marsh to jump from hag to hag.

"She would tell her story to anyone who asked her : she claimed she was the daughter of a well-to-do farmer and that she had fallen in love with her father's shepherd. Her father, an ambitious as well as an irascible man, shot him in the course of some argument; and he died in Grete's lap; he left her all his few small possessions — that is, the sheep and his garb, which she donned without hesitation, and left her father's house, never again to return to it.

"One day the bellwether, Hermann, strayed onto a meadow where he didn't belong. The ill-tempered owner at once set loose his dogs, who then ran the poor creature to death : for days Grete sat beside the corpse on the meadow; until they finally coaxed her away with the notion of a solemn funeral for him, which she agreed to with great enthusiasm. We children were all present, and even today I can still see that casket, fashioned from a crate and painted black, and the bunches of grass and wild flowers that she had laid upon it. With her hands she built a real funeral mound, pressed the sod firm, and fenced it in with willow rods. Until she died, she would come there several times a year and set things to rights. —

"In the winter she probably withdrew deeper into the forests; but, except for perhaps in the worst blizzards, she scorned all shelter. And many farmers would spontaneously give her hay for her sheep and some soup for her bowl whenever she came by. If she were teased too much, she could get nasty as well, and would then wish such evil on her teasers that, after some of her curses had come true, people preferred to leave her be. "Once as she was passing through a village some schoolboys tormented her so that she was at her wits' end, and in desperation she retaliated with stones. Whereupon, with loud halooings, the hooligans likewise began to throw things at her, finally picked up some bricks, and literally stoned that poor deranged creature to death. —

"And so this here is Tall Grete's grave ?" I asked, after an appropriate pause.

"This here ? Oh no," he replied dryly : "Hermann the ram lies buried here. — The farmer who loosed his dogs on him drowned in his own well 8 days later, of course." He gave a dignified and approving nod of his head : Justice must be served !

Linda Bamber

JEAN RHYS

Jean Rhys, who died in 1978 at age eighty-four, lived long enough to ride the wheel of literary fashion full circle. Taken up by Ford Madox Ford in the twenties, she was completely forgotten two decades later. In 1958 a British radio producer advertised for news of her whereabouts; Rhys herself answered the ad from Devon and subsequently resumed her literary career. Since the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966, there has been a steady growth of interest in her stories and novels. One by one all her books of the twenties and thirties have been reissued and enthusiastically reviewed; the final accolade came several years ago when A. Alvarez, writing in the *New York Times*, called her "the best living English novelist." Recently, articles of literary criticism have begun to appear on Rhys. Her readers seem confident that the job of evaluation is over and that her books may be treated as classics.

It would be interesting to know Rhys's own attitude towards her second wave of literary success. It was clearly gratifying to her at some level; under its influence she wrote the later stories published in the *New Yorker* and collected in *Sleep It Off, Lady* (1976). But Rhys was a woman more comfortable with failure than with success, and she apparently met her admirers with suspicion and some bitterness. She saw herself as an outsider, someone beyond the pale of respectable society; it is not surprising that she picked up on the unpleasant, rather than the pleasant, parts of her growing fame. Miriam Levine, the poet, interviewed Rhys in 1977 and reports that her conversation was, at least initially, prickly and self-protective. Rhys is quoted as follows:

I did a satiric piece on interviews called "Building Bricks Without Straws." They did a terrible piece about me in *Women's Wear Daily*. Mizener lied about me in his book on Ford. Some critic sent me this long article comparing me to Ann Radcliffe. You're not going to call me a Gothic novelist, are you?

Rhys is here playing the role she is most familiar with: Establishment Victim, in this case the victim of the literary establishment. Yet the literary establishment these days is unanimous in its enthusiasm for her work.

Rhys's sense of being an outsider must certainly have its roots in her personal history. Born in Dominica of a Welsh father and a Creole mother, she ran away to England at sixteen, married a French-Dutch poet and moved to France. In England she studied briefly at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts; then she went on the road as a chorus girl. With Jean Lenglet, the first of her three husbands, she led an irregular life, borrowing money and sleeping on other people's couches, often in some sort of trouble with the authorities. A contemporary describes the world Lenglet shared with Rhys as "an underworld of darkness and disorder, where officialdom, the bourgeoisie and the police were the . . . enemies and the fugitive the . . . hero." In one of her fitful efforts to make some money Rhys at one point translated a few of Lenglet's feature articles into English and peddled them to Paris-based representatives of British newspapers. It was while she was acting as Lenglet's agent that she was herself "discovered" as a writer. The sympathetic wife of a *London Times* correspondent read Rhys's journals, typed them up for her, and sent them on to Ford Madox Ford, at that time the editor of the *Transatlantic Review*. Ford became Rhys's literary mentor, her lover, and the subject of her future work. *The Left Bank* (1927) is a collection of stories that Ford helped into print; *Quartet* (1928) is about the period of time during which Rhys lived in a *ménage à trois* with Ford and his wife, Stella Bowen; and *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (1930) looks back on the affair after its unpleasant ending. Her last prewar novel, *Good Morning Midnight* (1939), was written more than a decade after her relations with both Ford and Lenglet were over. At this point, Rhys was remarried to Leslie Tilden Smith, reader for a British publishing company. Yet in the novel Rhys returns to the events of her early married life, replaying them in the memory of her aging heroine.

Rhys's novels, all of them autobiographical, have one subject: the victimization and self-victimization of a woman drifting along the edges of artsy-bourgeois society. The Rhys heroine has no money, no family to speak of, no particular talents. Out of sexual desperation (for she is always spurned by the man she loves) she picks up men who turn out to be cads or gigolos. These encounters usually take place in Bloomsbury or the Left Bank; the atmosphere is of café life, of cosmopolitan sterility. The heroine lives entirely in the present, and her ambition for the future is to get through the afternoon without crying. When she fails she says to herself, "Now, I'm a gone coon. I've begun crying and I'll never stop." The world shrinks to the size of the heroine's rented room—from which she

makes pathetic forays for a brandy and to which she returns, as like as not, to be bullied for her failures by the landlady.

Notably absent from Rhys's account of her heroine is any analysis of her plight in political terms. The Rhys heroine is a natural victim, not a victim of sexual politics or class oppression. As an exile of obscure origins she is more or less classless; and although she certainly feels brutalized by men, she insists that "I'm even more afraid of women." The problem is extremely general: "People are such beasts, such mean beasts," says the heroine of *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*. Elsewhere the formula is simply "life is cruel and horrible to unprotected people." The social analysis of Rhys's work stops with the assertion that there are outsiders and insiders, and that the one is entitled to resent the other. But even the resentment is fitful and limp. The Rhys heroine knows that she is largely responsible for her own unhappiness. Whenever something good comes her way—money, a man, the possibility of a good time—she instantly loses it through laziness, obsessiveness, or a kind of petty anger arising from her sense that it isn't enough.

Another notable absence in Rhys's work is the sense of place. We are told that we are in Paris rather than London, or vice versa, but it seems to make little difference. The outside world has withdrawn from the Rhys heroine. As long as there is a room, a street, or a restaurant for her to occupy, she doesn't bother much about the details. That is, of course, Rhys herself, in sympathy with her heroine's depression, makes no effort to find correspondences between the inner and the outer life. Her heroines experience the thinness of life and Rhys means for her readers to do likewise. Ford Madox Ford tells in the preface to *The Left Bank* how he tried to get Rhys to "introduce some sort of topography . . . into her sketches . . ." He goes on to say:

But would she do it? No! With cold deliberation, once her attention was called to the matter, she eliminated even such two or three words of descriptive matter as had crept into her work. Her business was with passion, hardship, emotions.

Rhys does sometimes include material that is interesting for its own sake: there are descriptions of the life of a Paris manikin, of a Bloomsbury group's horrible country vacation, of Left Bank parties. And in the first section of *Wide Sargasso Sea* she quite brilliantly works up the landscape of Dominica, where all relationships are as decadent as the lush, rotting vegetation. But the monotony of the

heroine's feelings is more likely than not to fill the whole frame, foreground and background.

Ford's description of Rhys's "business" is worth pausing over. According to Ford, and to many of Rhys's contemporary readers, the point of Rhys's work is the intensity of the heroine's inner life. From time to time Rhys will indeed claim a kind of energy for her heroine; in *Quartet*, for example, the "longing for joy" is said to be a "mad thing in her heart. . . like some splendid caged animal roused and fighting to get out." But the characteristic gesture in Rhys's novels is actually the *withdrawal* of emotional presence in times of crisis, not the enactment of fierce emotional needs. The following exchange between heroine and her lover is typical:

"I want to help you; I want you to get on. You want to get on, don't you?"

"I don't know," I said.

"But my dear, how do you mean you don't know? . . . What would you really like to do?"

I said, "I want to be with you. That's all I want."

"Oh, you'll soon get sick of me." He smiled, a bit as if he were sneering at me.

I didn't answer.

"Don't be like that," he said. "Don't be like a stone that I try to roll uphill and that always rolls down again."

"Like a stone," he said. It's funny how you think, "It won't hurt until I move." So you sit perfectly still. Even your face goes stiff.

The withdrawal here is twofold. The heroine, Anna, withdraws from the lover, her face stiff with pain; and Rhys withdraws from the reader into ellipsis and Hemingway-style understatement. Neither gesture seems compatible with mad, splendid longings for joy. Both the author and the heroine characteristically avert their eyes from precisely the "passion, hardship [and] emotion" that Ford thought central to Rhys's project.

A more recent admirer of Jean Rhys, A. Alvarez, explains the novelist's technique as follows:

She is . . . far too pure an artist to allow herself the luxury of self-pity. . . . The moments of drama and confrontation—when the

subterranean terror and despair seem about to burst through—remain strictly moments, done briefly, without comment or fuss from the outside. Her mind flicks away from them, quick as a fly, and settles on some small detail off to one side: her makeup is wrong, the light falls oddly, a bell rings, a car hoots. . . . And this. . . is far more unnerving than any full-throated howl of anguish can ever be.

To Alvarez, the withdrawals of consciousness are precisely the point. According to Alvarez, it is just when the author abandons the effort to render the heroine's feelings that they become most vivid to us, just when the heroine abandons her claims on life that we become aware of the depth of her needs. And yet as we can see from the dialogue leading up to Anna's withdrawal, the disappearances of the heroine and her author do not come at "moments of drama and confrontation—when the subterranean terror and despair seem about to burst through." They come at moments when the linguistic and emotional energy is already low. Anna can't get a job, can't want a job, can only throw herself on the mercy of her helpful/superior lover: "I want to be with you. That's all I want." When Anna averts her eyes from the inevitable response to her meagerness, her withdrawal is not a sudden and striking gesture of giving up. It is another step in the continuous retreat that is the form and content of Rhys's work.

Anna is the heroine of *Voyage in the Dark*, Rhys's first novel. This book describes Rhys's first love affair and was initially written in journal form. In *Smile, Please* (1978), Rhys's posthumously published autobiography, she comments on that affair as follows:

When my first love affair came to an end I wrote this poem:

I didn't know.
I didn't know.
I didn't know.

Then I settled down to be miserable.

But it still annoys me when my first object of worship is supposed to be a villain. . . .

On the contrary, I realise now what a very kind man he must have been. I was an ignorant girl, a shy girl. And. . . I realise I was also a passive, dull girl. Though I couldn't control my hammering heart when he touched me, I was too shy to say "I love you." It would be too much, too important. I couldn't claim so much.

Rhys here describes both her biographical self and the heroine of her

autobiographical novels. Like her heroines, Rhys couldn't claim much. That is, she could not make her claims directly; she based them on her weaknesses and failures rather than on her strengths. Stella Bowen, Ford's wife at the time of his liaison with Jean Rhys, tells us that, in life as in her fiction, Rhys self-consciously played the role of the loser:

Ford's girl was by no means without generous instincts and her world had its own standards of chic. . . . Yet here I was cast for the role of the fortunate wife who held all the cards, and the girl for that of the poor, brave, and desperate beggar who was doomed to be let down by the bourgeoisie. I learned what a powerful weapon lies in weakness and pathos and how strong is the position of the person who has nothing to lose, and I simply hated my role! I played it, however, until the girl was restored to health and a job materialized, since we appeared to represent her last chance of survival.

Bowen's analysis rings true, right down to the constant sense of "last chance" that Rhys creates in her novels. The final disaster, desertion or death, is always just around the corner. In *Quartet* Rhys explicitly claims pathos as her defining mode, commenting on the Ford and Bowen figures as follows:

Of course, there they were: inscrutable people, invulnerable people, and she simply hadn't a chance against them, naive sinner that she was.

The outside world is knowing and invulnerable, the Rhys heroine is "naive," innocent in spite of her sins, pure because helpless.

Rhys's helplessness is often a kind of "weapon" in her fiction just as it was in her life. Her silences are not, unfortunately, the true absences that Alvarez takes them for but a form of pressure for the reader's sympathy. Rhys's retreats have a double message. We cannot be such beasts, she seems to say, as to refuse our sympathy to someone with such poverty of artistic means, someone so helpless to make her own case. There is a kind of emotional blackmail to Rhys's technique: she is like a woman who leaves the room in silent agony, indicating in every line of her body an absolute demand to be followed.

What is particularly disturbing is that Rhys seems to equate her femininity with her pathos, the one reinforcing the other. In *Good Morning Midnight*, for instance, we hear of a "thin, scraggy and hunted" kitten: "Well, all the male cats in the neighborhood were on to her like one o'clock. She got a sore on her neck and the sore got

worse. . . . In the glass just now my eyes were like that kitten's eyes." The heroine is called romantic names like Antoinette, Petronella, Julia, Sasha, Roseau. She is as vulnerable as the kittens, sad children, and gentle prostitutes who so often cross her path; there is no question but that the feminine should be protected. The men who don't pay up, the lovers who fail to provide a haven for the heroine, practically perceive *themselves* as cads and slink ignominiously from the novels. The one time a Rhys heroine is satisfied with the behavior of "people" in general is when they do homage to her femininity during a pregnancy:

My face is pretty, my stomach is huge. . . . People are very kind to me. They get up and give me their seats in buses. *Passe, femme sacrée.*

"*Passe, femme sacrée*," of course, is offered ironically; and yet to Rhys it is a kind of tragedy when, as so often, the feminine is *not* held sacred.

Rhys's last book, *Smile, Please*, is a curious phenomenon. It was apparently undertaken to correct false impressions about the author's life. There were rumors that one of her two children was Ford's; not so, Rhys wanted us to know, both were Lenglet's. Her first lover was, as we have seen, a kind man, not a villain; Lenglet was arrested for currency violations, not robbery. But what developed from this impulse to set the record straight is a collection of fragments which are pointless, at best, and at their worst, quite ugly. Rhys finished only the first half of the book, the part on her childhood in Dominica; but even if we confine ourselves to that we must be surprised at what we are offered. Our attention is claimed for what cannot possibly interest us. We learn that Rhys had *petits pains* for breakfast while she was in convent school, not *croissants*; that she cannot remember how her father defined Nirvana; that when she first got a clothing allowance she bought herself a red tam-o'-shanter; that she loved the word "wisteria" and hated the word "cold." It is when she comes to the matter of race relations in Dominica that her book seems worse than shapeless. Rhys records her discovery that she was disliked by a black fellow student in tones of undisguised self-pity; and she includes this lethargically mean-spirited comment on the contemporary Caribbean situation:

When years later I paid a short visit to Dominica I went to the library of course. Instead of being empty it was crowded, a long queue before the librarian's desk. At first I thought it was a very touching sight, all the black hands, eagerly stretched out, holding

books. Then I noticed how ill the librarian, whom of course I knew, looked. As people filed past her she'd take the book, stamp it and give it back. No one looked at her and no one thanked her. They seemed to think that she was a machine and indeed there was something robotlike about the way she was working. Book after book and with each one she seemed to get more tired, look more ill. I wasn't at all surprised when I heard a few days later that she was dead.

I seem to be brought up willy-nilly against the two sides of the question. Sometimes I ask myself if I am the only one who is; for after all, who knows or cares if there are two sides.

Ludicrously, Rhys seems to imply that the spread of culture to the third world will result in the death of the Culture-keepers, overworked librarians. She doesn't mean it, of course; but what does she mean?

Smile, Please includes an admiring foreward by Rhys's editor at Harper and Row, Diana Athill, and is followed by a chronology of Rhys's life and a bibliography of her books. In the middle are pictures of Rhys's grandfather's church in Wales, Rhys's first and second husbands, and Rhys's return to Dominica in the thirties. In other words, the book treats Rhys as a classic author. There is something incongruous in the contrast between the featherweight text and the solemn superstructure that surrounds it. As Phyllis Rose points out in the *Yale Review*, "her autobiography will win her no new readers." And yet it has been, for the most part, reviewed as respectfully as it has been packaged. Rose is one of the few reviewers to admit that this book "demonstrates how *not* to write an autobiography" and that Rhys's talents as a writer have clearly been undermined by the fact that she was "frequently soused" while writing the book. Rhys, who was awarded the CBE (Commander of the Order of the British Empire) in 1978, is an institution. We have apparently learned from her the trick of silent withdrawal from her failures.

Jean Rhys had a hard life. She grew up imagining that life was elsewhere—in England; when she got to England it was dingy, cold, and hostile to her ambition to become an actress. The most appealing picture of Rhys in *Smile, Please* shows her posed in a tableau vivant with other young and pretty members of her troupe. But the energy and good humor of this moment faded during a grueling and humiliating tour of the north of England, and Rhys came to think of herself mostly in terms of her unsatisfactory rela-

tionships with men. Her first marriage ended in divorce; her second husband died seven years after her marriage to him. She lost a child, she herself was in poor health for the last fifteen years of her life. For the biographical woman who suffered all this we can have only sympathy. We are indeed "mean beasts" if we refuse to recognize in her an example of common human misfortune. But towards the heroine of her novels, towards the woman as she imagines herself, we may surely be permitted to feel some irritation and disapproval. Her unhappiness does not seem awful and inevitable, as Rhys's own unhappiness was. It is worn as a badge of honor, claimed as a position of power. The Rhys heroine considers her unhappiness a brilliant distinction. Sasha, the heroine of *Good Morning Midnight*, tells us:

I'm not talking about the struggle when you are strong and a good swimmer and there are willing and eager friends on the bank waiting to pull you out at the first sign of distress. I mean *the real thing*. You jump in with no willing and eager friends and when you sink you sink to the accompaniment of loud laughter.
[my italics]

To sink is more interesting than to swim, to be friendless is to experience *the real thing*. If only Sasha would value her pathos a little less than she does, perhaps she would become less pathetic. The great modern poets of our futility and choicelessness persuade us, against our wills, that there is no alternative to our difficulties. The Rhys heroine, however, proudly *refuses* alternatives. Her situation, therefore, is not necessarily ours. Within the shelter in *Endgame* is the whole of the modern world; we cannot escape it. But we need only visit the rented rooms of Rhys's novels when we are feeling low or broke or pissy. Who would do time there if she could help it? Not Rhys, certainly, who remarked in an interview:

When I was excited about life, I didn't want to write at all. . . . You see, there is very little invention in my books. What came first with most of them was the wish to get rid of this awful sadness that weighed me down.

The desolation in Rhys's work, then, is not to be mistaken for the whole story. It is only how things look when we feel bad. The novels powerfully evoke a mood, but it is a mood we would ordinarily do much to avoid: depression. There is very little here to distance us from the bad mood of her work. This is the thing itself, much as we might hear it from a friend in trouble or, if we were in the business, from the couch.

Carl Pletsch

FREUD'S CASE STUDIES

Reading through Sigmund Freud's case studies in chronological order is instructive experience for anyone interested in the intellectual history of psychoanalysis. One sees how Freud's technique evolved from the attempts to dispel particular symptoms that we observe in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) to the method of free association that he describes in his report on the case of Dora (1905). We see also how Freud's conception of the transference developed, from a primitive notion of transference as something to be avoided or dispelled to the mature conception of transference as the invaluable center of analysis. But most importantly, Freud's case studies show how he came, over time, to regard them as important vehicles of psychoanalytic knowledge.

Examination of Freud's case studies leads inexorably to questions of psychoanalytic knowledge—its locus, character, and epistemological status. For we must consider the cases as they relate to Freud's other writings. We must wonder whether Freud wrote his case studies for a specific readership, or whether the cases communicate to their readers in a unique fashion. These questions will lead us to delineate an important fissure in Freud's thinking and to speculate on the nature of Freud's most peculiarly psychoanalytic knowledge.

Two notions taken from the discourse of philosophy of science will assist us in our examination of Freud's case studies: "exemplars" and "personal knowledge." These notions operate here for the heuristic purpose of illuminating the place of case studies in the discourse of psychoanalysis and for speculating on the nature of psychoanalytic knowledge.

My understanding of the way in which Freud's (and later psychoanalysts') case studies constitute exemplars in psychoanalysis diverges in one important respect from the meaning of the term given by Thomas Kuhn, who in his later essays used "exemplars" to mean "shared examples of successful practice," which students of these disciplines learn, and which then serve to maintain the coherence of their research community. For psychoanalytic case

studies—Freud’s in particular—help all psychoanalysts to identify the problems posed by their patients, and to proceed in similar fashion, even though the examples are not always successful. The familiar case of Dora comes to mind: its practical failure does not detract from its value as an exemplar.

As important vehicles of the tradition of psychoanalytic knowledge, Freud’s case studies still communicate essential knowledge to psychoanalysts today. It is easier, however, to say what they are not than to specify what they are and how they work in the discourse of psychoanalysis. They are all highly detailed investigations of idiosyncratic cases. Freud seldom claimed for them the value of illustrations of theory, and as time went on he ceased to make such claims altogether. What psychoanalysts seem to derive from their study of Freud’s cases is a sense of how Freud thought, more particularly, how he thought with his patients. Even to the nonpsychoanalytic reader, Freud’s case studies seem to communicate how it feels to do psychoanalysis and to learn from patients. In contrast to his theoretical writings, Freud’s case studies may be the locus of intersubjectivity in psychoanalysis. If this is true, it suggests, borrowing now from Michael Polanyi, that Freud’s exemplary cases function as a kind of “personal knowledge.” Studying them, psychoanalysts tacitly learn to think like Freud.

The foremost question is that of the status Freud accorded his case studies. This inquiry is given greater significance by the fact that psychoanalysts have studied Freud’s cases as exemplary solutions to problems, and seem to have learned more from the case studies than from Freud’s theoretical propositions. The process of psychoanalytic education enshrined in the institutes of psychoanalysis suggests that it is largely the case studies—Freud’s and those published subsequently in the same spirit by his followers—that have enabled psychoanalysis to maintain its methodological coherence for so long.

The location of psychoanalytic insight in case studies rather than in theory suggests that the knowledge peculiar to psychoanalysis is constituted differently than the knowledge of a more thoroughly theory-based science. If so, the great energy expended in trying to reformulate Freud’s theoretical propositions to make them experimentally testable may not, despite the value such efforts may have for other purposes, contribute much to our understanding of what psychoanalytic knowledge really is. A fully descriptive account of psychoanalysis would have to pay more attention to case studies as

repositories and vehicles of this knowledge than has been done thus far. Such an account would involve an extensive study of the periodical literature of psychoanalysis, its monographs, and of psychoanalytic education as practiced in the institutes. This essay is only an attempt to see how Freud came to the tentative conclusion that case studies were the genre of psychoanalytic knowledge par excellence, and how he came to direct his more theoretical statements to the extrapsychanalytic reader. It is also an attempt to pose the question of psychoanalytic knowledge as a question of discourse.

Freud published his first case studies jointly with Joseph Breuer, whose patient “Anna O.” had actually invented the “talking cure” that constituted the rudimentary psychoanalytic method that Freud practiced in the 1890s. These first case studies appeared in *Studies on Hysteria* in 1895. From that year until 1915 when Freud completed his case history of the Wolf Man (published in 1918), Freud’s preoccupation with his evolving method of investigation and with forming a community of psychoanalytic investigators governed his innovative use of case studies.

Studies on Hysteria, one of the least coherent works in the Freudian corpus, was written by two authors who did not agree entirely on substance, and whose principal author had not yet completed his so-called self-analysis or begun the synthesis of ideas that he would publish as *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900. But the *Studies on Hysteria*, of fragmentary and tentative nature, permits an unhindered view of the authors’ anxiety about the case studies they report. Freud’s and Breuer’s concerns were not unlike what any late nineteenth-century natural scientists would have felt in the throes of giving birth to a new kind of knowledge.

Anna O. — in real life Bertha Pappenheim, the social worker, philanthropist, and founder of the *Jüdischer Frauenbund* — had been treated in the early 1880s by Breuer, who, for several reasons, was uncomfortable about returning to the case. As Ellenberger notes, the case ‘radically differed from the other cases of hysteria reported at that time, but was analogous to the great exemplary cases of magnetic illnesses in the first half of the nineteenth century.’ The case of Anna O. appeared to be a reversion to an earlier and ostensibly pre-scientific psychology. The anxiety of the two authors, therefore, must have been based partly upon the kind and quality of case study they were reporting, and not only on the fact that they were reporting a case study. Case studies were common enough in medicine and neurology. Just two years earlier, Freud had published a conven-

tional case history illustrating the effectiveness of hypnosis in clearing up symptoms of hysteria. This was unproblematic since the case merely illustrated a relatively common medical procedure and appeared to validate a theory. In *Studies on Hysteria*, however, Freud and Breuer were admitting the lack of medical and physiological authority over hysteria and, by implication, attributing to the patients the knowledge and power to cure themselves. As Freud noted, their cases also had more of a literary than a scientific character. And that, taken in conjunction with the fact that Freud and Breuer were using their cases to illustrate yet nonexistent theory, made *Studies on Hysteria* an anomalous book on an anomalous subject.

In *Studies on Hysteria*, the two authors carefully bracketed their detailed case studies by theoretical statements, giving their cast the appearance of mere illustrations. This was an obligatory formality dictated by the norms of scientific reporting, to which Breuer and Freud naturally subscribed. Nevertheless, the theoretical portions of *Studies on Hysteria* were its tentative aspects, and the case studies the real substance. Only in the case studies were the authors sure of their ground. That hysteria was a poorly understood but notorious class of nervous disorders is what interested Freud, who wanted to define its nature to clear up some of the mysteries in neuropathology. As Freud put it, "We have still to await the directing hand which shall set up boundary marks in the region of the commonly occurring neuroses and which shall bring out the features essential for characterization." In the meantime, however, he was "still accustomed to diagnosing a hysteria, . . . from its similarity to familiar typical cases." Thus Freud explains the necessity of reporting case studies: the "directing hand," implicitly his own, would define the distinctive features of hysteria, bringing the disorder under the umbrella of medical science and rendering case studies eventually unnecessary.

In another passage in *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud explicitly stated his anxiety as a neuropathologist doing a narrative analysis of a case of a nervous disorder. In his discussion of the case of Fräulein Elisabeth von R., he confessed:

I have not always been a psychotherapist. Like other neuropathologists, I was trained to employ local diagnoses and electro-prognosis, and it still strikes me myself as strange that the case histories I write should read like short stories and that, as one might say, *they lack the serious stamp of science*. I must console myself

with the reflection that the nature of the subject is evidently responsible for this, rather than any preference of my own. The fact is that local diagnosis and electrical reactions lead nowhere in the study of hysteria, whereas a detailed description of mental processes such as we are accustomed to find in the works of imaginative writers enables me, with the use of a few psychological formulas, to obtain at least some kind of insight into the course of that affection. Case histories of this kind are intended to be judged like psychiatric ones: they have, however, one advantage over the latter, namely an intimate connection between the story of the patient's sufferings and the symptoms of his illness—a connection for which we still search in vain in the biographies of other psychoses.

What worried him was that hysteria was drawing him out of a recognizably scientific discourse into a sort of literary discourse.

In 1895 Freud was still far from his mature understanding of hysteria, nor could he foresee how complex his reports of case studies would become two decades later, when he reported on the case of the Wolf Man. But *Studies on Hysteria* reads easily, not unlike the naturalistic narrative common in late nineteenth century fiction. In style, *Studies on Hysteria* constitutes both a reversion to the early nineteenth century and a harbinger of the twentieth. As Wolf Lepenies shows, when psychology was redefined as a medical science, around 1830 on the Continent, psychologists apparently felt obliged to repudiate the tradition of elegant descriptive investigation in which psychopathological states had formerly been made plausible. Thereafter, novelistic descriptions of psychology and psychopathology, such as those of Balzac, were no longer considered relevant to the science of psychology. It was left to Freud, in his careful description of individual cases, to reintroduce literary style as a tool of investigation in psychology. The simplicity of his narratives in *Studies on Hysteria*, however, is a measure of his naiveté vis-à-vis the problem of hysteria. As Freud came to understand hysteria better, his case studies became increasingly complex and entangled narratives. They did not resolve themselves into scientifically acceptable theories, but they became an independent genre of psychoanalytic investigation.

Freud's second case study, the *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (1905), written in 1901, is commonly referred to as the Dora case. As Ernest Jones wrote, it "served for years as a model for students of psychoanalysis." It was notorious among Freud's critics,

because he failed to achieve his therapeutic ends, and Dora left him after only three months in analysis. Her departure surprised him and caused him to consider at length what had gone wrong. Despite serious doubts, he eventually published the case for at least two reasons. First, the case turned largely upon two dreams. Since *The Interpretation of Dreams* had been recently published (1900), he was naturally inclined to take advantage of the opportunity to illustrate "how an art, which would otherwise be useless, can be turned to account for the discovery of hidden and repressed parts of mental life." Second, he wanted to show how the general therapeutic method he had outlined in the final chapter of *Studies on Hysteria* had led him to a far more sophisticated understanding of that anomalous disease of the mind than any other investigator had achieved.

Freud managed to convince himself that the difficulties inhering in this case suited it to become "a first introductory publication" on the question of hysteria. And this is precisely how it has been read by several generations of psychoanalysts. Using a still rudimentary notion of "transference," Freud argued that it was his failure to "master" or dispel the transference Dora had formed with respect to him that made for so short-lived a therapeutic encounter. He felt that he had been distracted by the readiness with which Dora put considerable quantities of pathological material at his disposal. Had he been aware that the transference had already developed to shield another portion of her pathology, he might have explained the matter to Dora and their interpretations might have led to the eventual resolution of her difficulties. As it was, he had the materials of her two rich dreams; he had her dramatic departure as an illustration of the transference; and he had grounds for inferring what additional materials the transference had masked.

Freud was subsequently unconcerned about the suspension of his therapy with Dora, but two other kinds of incompleteness influenced his consideration in reporting the case. First, since he wanted to focus upon hysteria rather than on his interpretive technique, he had not reported "the process of interpretation to which the patient's associations and communications had been subjected, but only the results of that process." And second, he reaffirmed the credo of the science of his day by stating that "a single case history, even if it were complete and open to no doubt, cannot provide the answer to all the questions arising out of the problem of hysteria." We may profitably reflect upon each of these additional senses of incompleteness in the account of Dora's case, for both questions had

concerned Freud when writing *Studies on Hysteria* and would occupy his attention in later case studies.

The dubious “objectivity” of his observations was prominent in Freud’s mind when he wrote his account of Dora’s hysteria. He notes that it was awkward “to publish the results of my inquiries without there being any possibility of other specialists testing and checking them.” But confidentiality was in fact a feature of medical ethics generally, and only the special nature of the materials under investigation in Freud’s work made this problematic. We must, therefore, look beyond what Freud called the prurience of his readers into the nature of psychoanalytic knowledge itself, if we are to appreciate the special problems of intersubjectivity presented by psychoanalysis.

Freud made two other observations suggesting that the material he was presenting in his study of Dora could not be appreciated by readers unfamiliar with his earlier work. Pointing out that his analysis of Dora was largely an interpretation of two dreams, he said he expected his readers to study *The Interpretation of Dreams* before reading his *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*. For although it was true that no other observer could check the veracity of his report of Dora’s dreams, the general principles of dream interpretation were accessible to every reader in his earlier book, and “everyone can submit his own dreams to analytic examination.” This was tantamount to suggesting that his readers undergo psychoanalysis, or “self-analysis,” before they read his account of Dora. In another passage, Freud suggested that familiarity with the ideas in *The Interpretation of Dreams* was not quite enough—one must agree with them to appreciate his study of Dora. Freud also linked the problem of Dora’s being a single case with the difficulty of checking his observations and suggested that these obstacles to the intersubjectivity of his insights could be overcome if the reader were sufficiently initiated into psychoanalysis. He did not, however, go beyond the implication that psychoanalysis is a specialized branch of knowledge that cannot be appreciated immediately by a novice, something that can be said about almost any scientific discipline. Later he would acknowledge that psychoanalytic knowledge had its own peculiar difficulties intimately related to its unique value.

Of the significance of the Dora case, Ernest Jones notes in his biography of Freud that “it is hard to convey what an amazing event it was for anyone to take the data of psychology so seriously. Yet that it should less than half a century after seem a commonplace is a

measure of the revolution effected by one man.” Additional remarks by Jones on Freud’s “close attention to detail” reflect the difficulty of presenting case studies: the rhetorical strategy he was forced to adopt. Here again his ideas had advanced since his work with Breuer. Although in writing *Studies on Hysteria* he had been distressed by producing something like short stories on the course of each patient’s illness, he nonetheless managed to make them into vigorous and illuminating narratives. But in his *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*—already an awkward title—Freud professed surprise that other scientific writers “can produce such smooth and exact histories in cases of hysteria.” He had observed that “the patients are incapable of giving such reports about themselves.” And their incapacity to give such reports was found to be an integral part of their illness: “the repression of memories and the expression in the form of symptoms of the conflicts associated with these memories that constitutes hysteria precludes the possibility of an orderly recounting of a patient’s life.” Moreover, Freud recognized that there were several stories which could not be told simultaneously. In the Dora case, he had distinguished only between the narration of his interpretive technique and the reconstructed biographic story in which the patient’s pathology had developed. Later, he felt that he could not weave these stories together, noting that “I have in this paper left entirely out of account the technique, . . . by whose means alone the pure metal of valuable unconscious thoughts can be extracted from the raw material of the patient’s associations.”

Freud had learned a great deal about the epistemological status of the knowledge he was deriving from hysterical patients since 1895. Paradoxically, what he had learned made him both more and less sanguine about the prospects of communicating this knowledge. He was much more aware of the difficulties of demonstrating the validity of his observations and hypotheses to the medical world at large, but he had begun to see that other initiates and especially practitioners of psychoanalysis were in a particularly advantageous position to appreciate his case studies. Ernest Jones writes that we do not know why Freud hesitated so long to publish the Dora case, but the way his thinking had changed since 1895 suggests a very strong reason. He took the case’s incompleteness very seriously and was influenced also by the absence of a psychoanalytic community in 1901. By 1905 the illustrative value the case held for other psychoanalysts outweighed his reservations about its reception by the uninitiated.

“Dora” was the last of Freud’s case studies to appear in a

medical journal not directly associated with the psychoanalytic movement. In late 1902 and 1903, the first meetings of what was to become the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society were held in Freud's waiting room, and in 1908 the first "international" meeting of psychoanalysts was held in Salzburg. At this meeting the decision was made to publish a psychoanalytic periodical to give the group its own forum. Thus in 1909 Freud was able to publish his next two case histories in the first two numbers of the *Jahrbuch für psychoanalytische und psychopathologische Forschungen*. These were his reports on the cases commonly known as Little Hans, *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy*, and the Rat Man, *Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis*. They were clearly aimed at a newly emergent readership of psychoanalysts.

The case of Little Hans especially gives the impression of a contribution *entre nous*. The raw materials for the report were supplied by the little boy's parents, who were, according to Freud, "among my closest adherents." Freud said he had "for many years been urging my pupils and my friends to collect observations of the sexual life of children" in order to compare such data to hypotheses about early sexual life derived from the analysis of adults, such as those he had published in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). The case of Little Hans was the most obvious fruit of this request. There were important theoretical reasons for sharing this case with psychoanalysts. Freud acknowledged that although the hypotheses in the *Three Essays* might seem incontrovertible to the uninitiated,

even a psycho-analyst may confess to the wish for a more direct and less roundabout proof of these theorems. Surely there must be a possibility of observing in children at first hand and in all the freshness of life the sexual impulses and wishes which we dig out so laboriously in adults from among their own debris—especially as it is also our belief that they are the common property of all men, a part of the human constitution, and merely exaggerated or distorted in the case of neurotics.

Here we see that although Freud continued to regard the case study as inferior to theoretical formulations, he accorded it an important role in the confirmation of hypotheses, i.e., in the validation process. He also seemed no longer worried about the fact that this was only *one case*.

Working now in the context of what he was later to call "the psychoanalytic movement," Freud discovered another use for the

case history—the pedagogical. In his conclusion to the *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy* he wrote:

Strictly speaking, I have learnt nothing new from this analysis, nothing that I had not already been able to discover (though often less distinctly and more indirectly) from other patients analysed at a more advanced age. But the neuroses of these other patients could in every instance be traced back to the same infantile complexes that were revealed behind Hans's phobia. I am therefore tempted to claim for this neurosis of childhood the significance of being a type and a model.

This is a particularly interesting passage in view of the importance that Freud's case studies have occupied in the curriculum of the psychoanalytic institutes. The account of Little Hans's phobia and its removal constitutes the first psychoanalytic case study written largely for didactic reasons. Of course, Freud had called his account of Dora's analysis "suitable as a first introductory publication," but with the scientific reading public at large in mind. In the case of Dora, Freud wanted to demonstrate his understanding of hysteria; in that of Little Hans, he wanted to show psychoanalysts how psychoanalysis proceeds and that the sexual etiology of adult neuroses can be confirmed in the analysis of a child. Freud's report on his analysis of the Rat Man, *Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis*, is less an illustration of a theoretical hypothesis than the case of Little Hans, and more directly oriented to the psychoanalytic readership of the *Jahrbuch*. In noting the incompleteness of his account of the case, Freud explained that he had "not yet succeeded in completely penetrating the complicated texture of a severe case of obsessional neurosis." But obsessional neuroses constituted a pathology on the frontier of psychoanalysis, much as hysteria had been an anomaly in neuropathology when Freud began to study it. This is what made Freud feel justified in communicating his insights to the psychoanalytic community to "serve as a starting-point for the work of other investigators, [so that] common endeavour may bring the success which is perhaps beyond the reach of individual effort." With this, I believe, we begin to see another pattern in Freud's thinking about his case studies: they were exemplary investigations, not necessarily solutions, to problems of psychopathology. He now perceived them as parts of a scientific research literature to which other psychoanalysts would contribute.

Freud said little enough about the transference in these two case studies published in 1909, but that may be precisely because these cases were written for psychoanalysts. There is evidence in remarks he made for nonpsychoanalysts on the subject of transference in the same year, that he believed experience in analysis was a prerequisite for the appreciation of the validity of insights derived from psychoanalysis. In his *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis* given at Clark University in 1909, Freud stressed that the experience of transference

plays a decisive part in bringing conviction not only to the patient but also to the physician. I know it to be true of all my followers that they were only convinced of the correctness of my assertions on the pathogenesis of the neuroses by their experiences with transference; and I can very well understand that such certainty of judgment cannot be attained before one has carried out psychoanalyses and has oneself observed the workings of transference.

This conviction that his followers had verified the value of his insights by their own experience with the transferences of their own patients must be seen as an important part of the basis of his new attitudes about case studies.

It is especially interesting that this experience with the transference in the analytic situation, as prescribed by Freud, might be the complement of the case studies in defining the peculiar nature of psychoanalytic knowledge. For whereas initially psychoanalytic knowledge was not located in case studies or derived from the transference, in the evolution of Freud's thinking, experience with the transference became a prerequisite to understanding his cases—a "personal knowledge" required of every psychoanalyst. But unlike the many examples of personal knowledge given by Polanyi in his book by that name, the transference is only useful when the psychoanalyst is acutely conscious of it. Thus it is a kind of knowledge that depends upon the psychoanalyst's ability to articulate it; and it is more thoroughly "personal knowledge" than the skills that other scientists learn by empathy and imitation from their teachers. Transference seems to constitute a form of intersubjectivity that can only be defined as "articulated implicitness," or, in psychoanalytic terms, the unconscious made conscious. In this it is both highly subjective and yet the shared medium of communication that constitutes the basis of psychoanalysis.

Freud's analysis of Daniel Paul Schreber's delusion, published in 1911 as *Psychoanalytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia*, is not a case study in the same sense as the others inasmuch as Freud had no personal contact with Schreber, nor did Schreber himself have any experience with psychoanalytic theory (as even Little Hans had). Schreber had, however, written an elaborate account of his mental illness and published it as his *Memoirs of a Mental Patient*. Freud used these published memoirs as the basis of his analysis, and again presented it primarily to psychoanalysts rather than to the medical world at large.

Freud's general aim in writing his account of Schreber's illness was to establish the nature of paranoia and its location among other psychoanalytically understood mental disorders. As he had been at pains to distinguish obsessional neuroses from hysteria in his account of the analysis of the Rat Man, he now wanted to establish paranoia as a diagnostic category. This reminds us of his original anticipation in *Studies on Hysteria*, of the "directing hand which shall set up boundary marks" among the various mental disorders. But the difficulties in the area of paranoia were particularly grievous and are reflected in the fact that Freud was compelled to base his discussion of this disorder upon a written account rather than an analysis. People suffering from paranoid delusions were not apt to submit to psychoanalysis, a process which would naturally elicit all their fears of persecution and cause them to ascribe their persecutions to the psychoanalyst. Having virtually no paranoid patients, therefore, Freud found himself forced to rely upon Schreber's account. In view of these difficulties, it is all the more interesting and revealing that Freud should have chosen to convey his insights on paranoia in the form of a case history.

Freud may have done this because no other mode of reporting constituted a plausible alternative. Or perhaps because of the unusually florid nature of the pathology of this particular case. But whatever the mixture of motives, Freud's report on the Schreber case has remained the cornerstone of psychoanalytic thinking on paranoia to this day.

The Schreber case had consequences in the developing history of the psychoanalytic community. Ernest Jones and others have suggested that Freud's remarks in the Schreber case sowed the seeds of the soon-to-be-accomplished dissociation of Carl Jung and his followers from Freud, and the eventual disaffection of Sandor

Ferenczi. But far from suggesting that Freud's essay failed in its role of exemplar to help maintain the coherence of the psychoanalytic community of investigation, this demonstrates the power of the case study to define the boundaries of the nascent discipline. Reading Freud's case studies, it seems, not only guided and educated Freud's followers, but also served to separate less orthodox analysts from the movement. In fact, Freud's next case study was even more important in separating errant analysts.

Freud's last lengthy case study, his analysis of the Wolf Man, was written in the winter of 1914-1915 and entitled *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis* (1918). This is Freud's most complicated and intricately argued case, and he used it both to demonstrate his technique to his followers and to define the boundaries of psychoanalysis by showing how Jung and Adler had excluded themselves from the group of proper practitioners. But this only further emphasizes the degree to which he relied upon case studies to establish his ideas. Freud's description in an introductory passage to this study as "an objective estimation of the analytic material" confirms that he had ceased to worry about the lack of objectivity and about the fact that cases were single instances. The case as a whole, furthermore, contains some of Freud's most explicit statements on the value and significance of case studies.

One of the central issues of Freud's account of the Wolf Man's infantile neurosis is closely related to a central theme of the Dora case: the importance of "libidinal motive forces" in psychopathology. The difference in Freud's conception of his readers and critics in the two cases illustrates how he thought psychoanalysis had progressed in establishing itself as an autonomous scientific discipline.

The criticisms Freud had had to confront at the time he published the case of Dora were based on resistance in the medical profession and the population at large to the very idea of infantile sexuality. The critics Freud had in mind in 1914-1915 were psychoanalytic initiates, prominent exponents of psychoanalysis who had subordinated the data of infantile sexuality to other factors, such as the need for power in the case of Adler, or the cultural values of the collective unconscious in the case of Jung.

In his "Wolf Man," Freud distinguished between kinds of skepticism about psychoanalytic ideology:

The whale and the polar bear, it has been said, cannot wage war on each other, for since each is confined to his own element they cannot meet. It is just as impossible for me to argue with workers

in the field of psychology or of the neuroses who do not recognize the postulates of psycho-analysis and who look on its results as artifacts. But during the last few years there has grown up another kind of opposition as well, among people who, in their own opinion at all events, take their stand upon the ground of analysis, who do not dispute its technique or results, but who merely think themselves justified in drawing other conclusions from the same material and in submitting it to other interpretations.

Hard on the heels of this rather charming assertion of disciplinary orthodoxy vis-à-vis Adler and Jung, Freud stated most explicitly that the presentation of case studies is superior to theoretical debate:

As a rule, however, theoretical controversy is unfruitful. No sooner has one begun to depart from the material on which one ought to be relying, than one runs the risk of becoming intoxicated with one's own assertions, and in the end, of supporting opinions which any observation would have contradicted. For this reason it seems to me to be incomparably more useful to combat dissentient interpretations by testing them upon particular cases and problems.

The disagreement over the centrality of infantile sexuality between Freud on the one hand and Jung and Adler on the other led Freud to focus almost exclusively upon the Wolf Man's infantile neurosis, the course of which had been terminated in childhood. This involved him once again in reporting a severe case "only in a fragmentary manner." As Freud noted in his final chapter, significantly entitled not "Conclusion" but "Recapitulations and Problems," "it must be recognized that everything cannot be learnt from a single case and that everything cannot be decided by it; we must content ourselves with exploiting whatever it may happen to show most clearly. Furthermore, problematic and severe cases were found to have the greatest instructive value and his published "exemplars" were never completely satisfying resolutions of all the problems involved. The Wolf Man's later difficulties and his reanalysis thus cannot be a reproach to Freud's treatment of him, but a confirmation of his expectations.

The "fertile difficulties" of the case of the Wolf Man complicated the presentation even more than his earlier cases, but Freud preferred to make this attempt at the risk of overstraining his own expository powers in order to further the exploration of this

territory. Earlier in the essay, at the beginning of his "General Survey of the Patient's Environment and of the History of the Case," Freud had more general things to say about reporting case studies:

I am unable to give either a purely historical or a purely thematic account of my patient's story; I can write a history neither of the treatment nor of the illness.

Essentially, a psychoanalytic case study can never be a simple narration, for many stories intersect in any analysis. There were of course more stories than the history of the illness and the treatment involved in Freud's analysis. A careful accounting would have to include at least the patient's actual life history, the patient's narration of his life, the verbatim history of the analysis, the history of the psychoanalyst's interpretations, the life history reconstructed by the psychoanalyst, and the history of the patient's acquisition of self-knowledge.

The tortuous complexity of Freud's essay on the Wolf Man illustrates the violence that Freud's investigations did to the narrative style that had been current in the late nineteenth century. The 115-page essay is divided into an unprecedented nine parts. The history of the patient's illness occupies scarcely five pages. One of the nine parts is anomalously entitled "A Few Discussions," and the conclusion, as I have already indicated, "Recapitulations and Problems." This complexity and awkwardness is the result, I believe, of a long process during which Freud recognized more thoroughly in each case study he wrote that intricacy in this genre of scientific reporting was integral to its value for psychoanalytic knowledge.

Complexity and awkwardness were thus not disadvantages inherent in case studies of psychoanalyses, which could be overcome if psychoanalytic knowledge could only be translated into theoretical propositions. Ernest Jones said the case was "assuredly the best of the series," and most psychoanalysts would agree. The complexity was the very strength of the psychoanalytic case study that lent it to the propagation of new insights among those who already understood the psychoanalytic process of investigation. This intricacy was also an important part of the Freudian world-view which migrated into fiction in the early twentieth century in the form of stream-of-consciousness writing and other departures from nineteenth-century narrative form.

If Freud's case studies are not only psychoanalytic exemplars, but a particular sort of "personal knowledge" as well, then Freud's tortuous thinking is an advantage, deepening the conviction and insight of those who wished to follow him further in psychoanalysis. For the psychoanalysts willing to study Freud's cases as exemplary analyses, the Wolf man led them once again beyond the frontier.

His two additional case studies, published in 1915 and 1920 however, do not advance his thinking in this genre. Several factors may help explain why Freud wrote so few case studies after he had come to his conclusions about their value in 1914-1915. By the time he published his analysis of the Wolf Man, the psychoanalytic movement was definitely established as a discipline. Freud's followers also had begun to present and publish their own case studies in psychoanalytic journals, and Freud devoted considerable energy to criticizing and commenting on their work. The boundaries of psychoanalysis were set and the major psychoanalytic apostates definitively separated from the movement. Freud himself, relaxing in this atmosphere of long-awaited security, turned to projects designed to secure wider recognition of psychoanalysis. The case study was now established as the methodological anchor which united psychoanalysts in their scientific community.

By the time psychoanalysis became an organized discipline of research, Freud's case studies had acquired the status of psychoanalytic knowledge par excellence, although not the only kind of psychoanalytic knowledge, for one must distinguish this knowledge for psychoanalysts from the knowledge of psychoanalysis Freud purveyed in his more expository and theoretical works. Further distinctions may be made based upon differences in the ways in which psychoanalytic knowledge is transmitted and the uses to which it is put. There are, in other words, many discourses of psychoanalysis, but for clinical purposes case studies form the kernel of knowledge, and thus are central to the description of psychoanalytic knowledge.

Freud's oeuvre both opened the discourse of psychoanalysis and prefigured the fissures that have developed in psychoanalytic discourse. I have traced only one of these fissures, showing that behind the explicit difference between the genres of Freud's writing intended for different audiences lay a tension between the positivistic notions of science that Freud had imbibed with his medical education, in which theory predominated, and another notion of knowledge that arose from or was produced by the psychoanalytic

mode of knowing itself. The view of knowledge implied in Freud's increasing reliance upon case studies never fully triumphed over Freud's commitment to theory, but it represents the more radical departure from the tradition of positivistic scientific discourse in Freud's oeuvre, and must thus be regarded as a distinguishing feature of psychoanalysis.

Thus the data of nervous disorder forced Freud to this view of his case studies as the locus of peculiarly psychoanalytic knowledge. For data were patients, their dreams, their slips of the tongue, and ultimately their transferences and Freud's counter-transferences. He found himself organizing a community of investigators who experienced transference in their own analyses (often with Freud) and in their analyses of patients. For this community, the case study proved the ideal genre of communication. Thus Freud was forced to his novel view of knowledge by two strictly social configurations: his relationships with his patients and with the scientific communities, first of medicine and physiology and later of psychoanalysis.

This brings us back to the question of psychoanalytic knowledge as one of discourse. For the two relationships that pulled Freud toward his view of psychoanalysis as personal, exemplary knowledge in the case studies turn out to be the irreducible axes of psychoanalytic discourse. The discourse of analyst and patient is psychoanalysis in practice, and the discourse of analyst and fellow analysts is psychoanalysis as a discipline. Every other discourse of psychoanalysis derives ultimately from one or both of these.

Freud's case studies (and the case studies published since) are of course not identical with these two levels of discourse. But of all the writings by Freud and his early followers, it is in the case studies that both discourses are most fully precipitated. The evolution of Freud's attitude as he wrote the case studies reveals that his awareness of the significance of the case study emerged hand in hand with his realization that psychoanalysis constituted a new kind of knowledge. The case studies lead us not only to an appreciation of an important fissure in psychoanalysis—the distinction between knowledge for psychoanalysts and the knowledge of psychoanalysis—they lead to questions about the nature of psychoanalytic knowledge. Early in his career Freud's highest ambition had been to make his mark as a natural scientist and to formulate his beliefs in theoretical terms. The role of such scientific ambition is especially clear in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, where he put forward such pseudo-theories as

that every dream must be the fulfillment of a wish. Formulae of this sort have enabled philosophers of science like the neopositivist Karl Popper to categorize psychoanalysis as a “pseudo-science.” Popper claims that “no description whatsoever of any logically possible human behavior can be given which would turn out to be incompatible with the psychoanalytic theories of Freud.” Thus many of Freud’s theories appear to be untestable and unscientific. This is a criticism that psychoanalysts find difficult if not impossible to answer. But if we recognize the case study which gradually emerged in Freud’s work as the locus of the most specifically psychoanalytic knowledge, then criticism that supposes psychoanalysis to be located in theories is surely misplaced. That is not to suggest that psychoanalysis is immune to criticism. But the history of Freud’s case studies demonstrates that psychoanalysis is a science constituted primarily of exemplars rather than theories. As such, it is a distinctive discourse and a significant form of knowledge.

Dick Howard and John Mason

**DISSIDENCE IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA:
AN INTERVIEW**

Dick Howard: I think we should begin by discussing the student movement in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s.

Jan Kavan: Yes, to understand what happened in the seventies, and therefore to predict what will take place in the eighties, it is important to examine the sixties. That is because the opposition movement, as I perceive it, has never at any point ceased to exist. It was an uninterrupted, continuous opposition, and I am happy to say that I have been part of it since the very early sixties.

The student movement was the only organized group outside the Party structure which, in some sort of programmatic sense, was trying to put forward reform ideas, to suggest a type of program for change. Its general objective, to build a socialist society, was identical with the aim of the Party, but its perception of the way to achieve this goal differed from the Party's. The students wanted a political organization of their own, one created by the youth and for the youth, which would express the interests of the youth and their ideas about society.

Throughout the sixties, the students represented the most politicized section of society, and played the role of catalyst to the events of late 1967 which toppled the Novotný regime. At the same time, it is necessary to stress that at no point during the sixties was there any explicit political cooperation between the student movement and the reformists in the Party. These movements remained parallel to each other as they developed. There was a certain cooperation between the intellectuals, especially the writers, and the reformists in the Party, but despite the common areas of interest, the methods again differed. Other intellectuals, even some Party members, preferred to exercise pressure on the Party from outside it because this gave them greater scope to express more radical views and behavior than was possible for the reformists within the Party. But even those groups outside the Party still believed in a formal, institutionalized opposition based on the perception of society as a sort of pyramid of organs in which

even public opinion was reduced to the opinion of organs.

Howard: The student movement was a threat because it was independent from the Party, from the organs that control society. That was, so to speak, its negative side. Positively, as I recall it, there was also a kind of cultural revolution going on in Czechoslovakia at the time, in nearly all of the arts.

Kavan: I think that the term *cultural revolution* was not used—it remained specific to the developments in the Chinese Peoples' Republic. But there is certainly a link between cultural and political issues in the sixties, as in the eighties.

One can summarize the issue by examining the media during the Novotný regime. Novotný was the sort of apparatchnik who believed that most people read newspapers and go to cinemas, and therefore these media would have to be controlled strictly so that new ideas would not enter people's minds. On the whole, like most party apparatchniks, he was afraid of the people, and of the people beginning to think in political terms. The so-called party of the working class was always highly suspicious of the working class—afraid of the working class—and at the same time very patronizing toward it, believing that one thing in which they did not want to be interested was politics. Basically, they thought that if workers read newspapers, they read the sports page.

Novotný also believed, wrongly, that things like theater or music are things only a few intellectuals would be interested in. Therefore, the level of restriction on, say, theater or poetry was very little—which is why, looking back, a lot of people now call Novotný an “enlightened dictator,” as compared with the present one. Novotný overlooked the fact, which surprised some of my Western journalist friends, that there was a queue outside the main bookshop of the Union of Writers every Thursday morning when a new book appeared, and that workers came to poetry evenings, and that the small cinemas, as they were called, were always overcrowded and difficult to get into.

The first political ideas (in the general sense of *political*) were actually discussed through these media. The present regime knows this only too well. Mr. Husak was one of the few present leaders who, in the 1960s, was actually persecuted, and he knows perfectly well that through this loophole you can influence the system. He is determined to plug the loophole, and it is this that is leading today in the direction that must be described as “cultural genocide.” Nevertheless, an underground culture is developing—

living-room theater, pop music, concerts, novels, poetry, some journals, and various other forms of cultural expression, including forms of parallel university.

Similar forms could be seen during the seventies in Poland. It is what, in Czechoslovakia, contributed to the emergence of *Charter '77* (to which we shall return). Interestingly, when the human rights movements from Czechoslovakia and Poland began to cooperate and collaborate more, one of the first themes they discussed was the role of the alternative culture, or alternative communities, within society. How do these affect the political structures? How could the alternative communities be enhanced? In both countries you now have almost all the ingredients of an alternative society. Of course, once they get expressed in terms of alternative trade union movements and the like, then the whole structure of the system shakes.

One final point on the continuities in the history of the struggle. Kuron and Modzelewsky, the authors of the *Open Letter* to the Polish party in the sixties, after being jailed, have returned as activists in the KOR and Solidarity movements. Jiri Miller, one of the leaders of the activist movement in Czechoslovakia, was persecuted in 1966, which is about the year that Kuron was imprisoned. In March 1968, another student leader, Lubos Holoccek, expressed the first clear dissatisfaction with the policies of the Dubcek group. He and Miller were among the first to reject the capitulation in Moscow at the end of 1968, and to reject the Dubcek compromise policy between August 1968 and April 1969, and they were the first to start an opposition movement against the Husak regime. Miller was one of the first arrested in 1971 and sentenced to five years for taking part in that opposition, and one of the first to sign the *Charter '77* statement in January 1977. Today, both are active in the Charter and other political movements inside the country.

Howard: This brings us up to the present. What is the opposition today?.

Kavan: Since 1977, the most well-known group—although they refuse the term *opposition* for a number of reasons—is the human rights movement, *Charter '77*. *Charter '77*, to a certain extent, was born out of things which, on the surface, seemed nonpolitical. At the end of 1976, there were a number of different political groups. The most well-known in the West was the Euro-Communist group, based on the Prague Spring ideas of Alexander Dubcek

and company, but numerically they did not represent the majority. The groups spanned the ideological spectrum (with the exception—using your terms—of right-wing groups, who were not there and are still not there). When two rock groups were tried for their unorthodox songs and unorthodox music, suddenly a defense campaign sprang up on their behalf, both inside Czechoslovakia and in the West, uniting various political groups. Informal, personal links developed among all these various opposition groups.

It was during this period that Czechoslovakia published the full text of the International Conference on Civil and Political Rights. . . .

Howard: The Helsinki Accords?

Kavan: No, not the Helsinki Accords. The Helsinki text is of a declaratory nature; it's not legally binding. In 1976, following the Soviet-led part of détente with its image-making goals, the government ratified the 1968 Helsinki Declaration, which contained both the International Covenant on Political Civil Rights and The International Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights. They were published in November 1976 as Czechoslovak Law 120. This was at the time when people had begun to look at the laws to try to find out how opposition groups could function legally. Now in this new law, there was suddenly guaranteed freedom of press, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, also freedom to strike, freedom to create independent unions—all these fantastic freedoms for which they had been fighting for so many years.

Now, as I said, an informal network already existed among the various opposition groups. That network seized the opportunity to write a Declaration which was fairly innocuous, just drawing attention to the fact that the government had ratified this law, and that there was a certain gap between the law and actual practice, and a gap between this particular law and the rest of the laws—especially the code which permitted sentencing people to up to ten years for exercising the very freedoms now ratified. The Declaration offered the government what it called a “constructive dialogue”—a phrase inserted by the Euro-Communist group and supported by the others.

That's how *Charter '77* came into being. At the very beginning, the government's reaction—that this was a group of intellectuals and former politicians—was correct to a certain

degree. Of the 242 signatures only 17 were workers. The government immediately launched a media campaign against the Charter. Within twenty-four hours every worker in every factory, every person in every village, knew that there was something very dangerous called *Charter '77*. The Minister of the Interior forbade publication of even an extract of the document, arguing that it was formulated with such sophistication that people, if they read it, would not realize how dangerous the document was. About two million people, he said, would sign it immediately. Therefore, there was a fantastic arousal of interest in the document and people tended to project their expectations into it. They became enthusiastic supporters of the Charter even before they actually read it. Though there was a certain disappointment when they actually read the document, it was not strong enough to break the movement. At the end of 1978, the movement had a large number of workers, blue and white collar, as well as people from outside Prague (though it had begun only in the capital), and it had a large influx of younger people who really began to think politically only as a result of the fear created in the country by the Charter movement. That was, I think, the greatest change that the Charter achieved. It politicized a great number of people.

John Mason: One of our problems in the West seems to be that the existing institutions have succeeded in co-opting radical movements and have, to a certain extent, used the legal system or the cultural character of our protests to depoliticize the movements behind them.

Kavan: The capitalist-democratic system as it exists today is definitely capable of living with an alternative movement of the sort we are talking about. It can absorb it and tolerate it. The impact is different in Eastern countries because the bureaucratic style of dictatorship cannot tolerate any type of independent action. It can only function if it is totally universal, if it controls every type of independent action. Any type of independent activity challenges not just the particular aspect, but the whole system. Even communities that say, "We want to live with the regime without conflict, parallel to it, without challenging it," are a threat to the legitimacy of the system as such. The system, for its own survival, has to suppress them. By the act of suppression, by continuous political crushings, a situation is created where any attempt to think independently, let alone to act independently, means a permanent struggle with the power center. This results in the politicization of people.

Howard: You seem to say that this opposition movement is unified as opposition, but divided among itself. I even notice that you've got a certain implicit criticism of Euro-communism that you haven't really expressed. Now the Leninist question, of course, would be who is going to be doing the unifying of this movement; who is going to be bringing it "class consciousness"? Now, let me go a step further with the Leninist image. Here you are in the West, in London, running Palach Press. This has analogies to a certain Mr. Illich (i.e., Lenin) who was running a press from outside Russia and bringing "class consciousness from the outside." It is a nasty question perhaps, but where is the unification going to come from; where is the political content going to come from?

Kavan: I don't think your question is nasty; I think it reflects many of the attitudes I've encountered in the West during my ten-year absence from Czechoslovakia. First of all, yes, I think the opposition is unified, especially on the things they do not want, on sort of a negation of the system they now live in. It's not unified on the type of society they want to live in, or rather it does not accept the idea that one could come to a formula that would be acceptable to all. The opposition concludes that it is not unified on the matter of how to attain such a society. Very definitely, there are differences. You mentioned that you've perceived in my answers a certain skepticism towards Euro-communism. I think it reflects the widespread disillusionment in Czechoslovakia with reformist communists, and I stress that because in 1968 Czechoslovakia was the country out of all the Eastern European countries where the possibility of actually creating a society which would reflect most of the principal ideas inherent in Euro-communism had the greatest chance and the greatest potential. It's a fact that in times of crisis the reformist communists were not capable of rallying the people against the common enemy, that in times of crisis the leaders of the Party, at least, showed that they were more afraid of the people than they were of the invading armies and the consequences of invasion, which led to a beginning of skepticism, of widespread disillusionment. It gave birth to a desire to look for alternative ways to attain a socialist society, and this is why, for example, a new group called Independent Socialist emerged, which is trying to unite all noncommunist socialists, and which defines itself against the reformist communists and takes a different point of departure. So there are these differences and

they will not be easy to resolve, but the opposition will be using familiar methods known around the world.

One aspect of the parallel you made does not apply: the parallel with the situation of Lenin before the 1917 Revolution. There is no need for any group, be it emigré or a Western political group, to bring class consciousness from the outside into Czechoslovakia. People become aware of their interest as members of a specific political class very clearly and very fast. The history of the opposition movement, and the history of all postwar Czechoslovakian politics, proves that there is absolutely no need to import class consciousness from the outside. The role of groups such as ours, which are politically active outside the country, is a different one. It is really aimed at the West, to show that events which are happening in the East are relevant to the West, and to supply factual information not available through Czech governmental agencies. This is what I am trying to do at Palach Press. We are able to be in contact with the movement there practically once a week. In fact, our greatest difficulty is a problem that on paper looks easy, that is, how to channel effectively this information into the Western media and to Western political organizations.

Mason: It seemed to me that you implied that there are strong ideological motivations in the West for misunderstanding the character of the opposition struggles that are now going on in Eastern Europe. Perhaps there is an unholy alliance between the political establishment in Western countries and the institutional Left in many of the same countries to encourage public indifference or confusion about the Eastern European opposition. For example, often in the Western media we are presented with televised pictures and newspaper photographs that reinforce the impression that the Eastern European opposition has the same countercultural, extrapolitical character as the Western counterculture did in the 1960s. I'm thinking here of pictures of the "plastic people" which make us think we're looking at an album cover for Sergeant Pepper's Lonelyhearts Club Band. We tend to dismiss the counterculture. It wasn't a real opposition, a political opposition, but something that could be absorbed as a marketing strategy.

Kavan: Let me start with the image you offered of the unholy alliance of the Western Left and the Western establishment. If one just looks at practical effects, one could easily suspect that there is such

an alliance, although I am not sure whether such an alliance is a conscious or (as I feel it to be) an unconscious one—the result of misreading certain facts. From the place where I stand, I can clearly see an unholy alliance between the Western establishment and the state structures in the East, that is, with the Eastern European establishment. But coming back to your question, I think if the West European parties that argue that they will make Prague Spring in Paris or Rome were consistent and actually managed to recreate Prague Spring in Rome, Paris, London, or New York, then I'd be very glad. But I suspect that they are not only perpetrating a myth of Prague Spring, but are themselves the victims of their own myth. I think that they do not perceive Prague Spring in its entirety. Prague Spring was not just the attempt of the reformist communists to reintroduce socialism with a human face; it wasn't just the attempt of a Czechoslovakian type of Euro-communist party to put into effect its policies (that was only part of Prague Spring, although, by the way, a very important part, especially in the first few months of 1968). The Prague Spring actually followed as a result of a series of mistakes, such as lifting censorship entirely in March 1968. The sort of free press which we experienced from the beginning of April 1968 was a sort of freedom not yet in existence anywhere in the world. This led to the creation of a mechanism outside the Party composed of political clubs and organizations which, backed by the free press, were able to create a process of change which the Party had no intention of creating when it started its policies. In that sense, in the summer of 1968, the Party was no longer fully in control of what was happening; it was reacting to the movement. If I were to summarize what Prague was in one sentence, I would say it was a nationwide discussion about what socialism is, and about how to achieve it. What you saw that summer when the clubs and organizations mushroomed was a type of the countercultural activity you were referring to in your question, but countercultural activity which was very political in its impact. This relates to what I said earlier, that in this type of society you cannot have any independent action which is apolitical. All such activity has a distinct political impact and, therefore, if I may jump from 1968 back to today, the widespread parallel cultures of the alternative communities which exist now have as their direct historical antecedents the organizations of the Prague Spring movement. They are not simply a copy; they reproduce not only

the form but the political content. They have a clear political impact on society, and the regime demonstrates this through the repressive measures it takes against members of the alternative communities. It recognizes that it is being challenged by a form of political action.

If you look at today's Poland, the original alternative community, organized around the committee for workers' rights, reflects the social conflicts in the society in such a significant way that the whole survival of the Polish system now depends on how the government meets the challenge. I would argue that the state cannot coexist with that community in its present form as a genuinely independent union. It cannot survive while such an independent organization claims that it represents the interests of the working class vis-à-vis the Party. The Party's historical claim to power is that it represents the interests of the working class and is the sole representative of such interests. It cannot tolerate being treated by the workers as an adversary, as the manager, the bureaucrat, the owner of the means of production, whose particular interest is in conflict with the interests of the working class as a whole. The government has only one choice: that is to find a way to neutralize that movement, either by police means (which would be extremely regrettable), or by divide-and-conquer tactics, by bribery and corruption, in order to transform that trade union apparatus into another transmission belt for the Party. If all else fails, the Party will use the Soviet army, and ironically also call upon the army and police of the present Czechoslovakian establishment, the very one which came to power as the result of the suppression of a movement which already anticipated in 1968 many features of the Polish summer of 1980.

Mason: The other side of my notion of an unholy alliance was the idea that Western institutions such as the major banks have a commitment to the preservation of the status quo in Eastern Europe that is not widely understood by the Western public.

Kavan: There is a link between the establishment in the West and the establishment in the East. Both have much more in common with each other than with left-wing movements, or countercultures in their own countries. I hope we can establish something I have been saying for years, that movements in the East and West have much more in common with each other than with their respective establishments. I think that both establishments need stability for their own survival, and this need for continuous stability leads to

policy decisions based on the preservation of the status quo. Human rights considerations have always been divorced from the establishment's perceptions of its vital interests. The establishment wants to preserve the stability of existing markets; it wants to have the possibility of creating new ones, and to know that a return on their investments will be guaranteed. This is clearly the case in the present Polish situation, where the first reaction of the Soviet Union and the conglomeration of West German banks, and the American government as well, was to help the Poles by investing money, by enlarging the fantastic loans which have already been given to Poland.

Howard: Help the Poles? You mean help the Polish rulers?

Kavan: Yes, that's what I meant, help the Polish rulers. The Western mass media presents the decision as a decision to help the Poles by lending them money. That money is actually being distributed among Polish corporations, it is not given to the working class who, quite correctly, state that their wages are not adequate to allow them to buy basic foodstuffs. That money is being lent by one establishment to the other establishment. The one thing the West definitely doesn't do is to help the opposition movements in the country. They are not working to help the striking workers in Poland or the political opposition movements in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, or elsewhere. Such help would lead to a long period of destabilization, to a period of uncertainty. It would result in a zone of instability where they would not be able to invest for fear that they could never be sure of getting their investments out.

Let's jump back to 1968 for example. Czechoslovakia was in great need of economic help and asked for a relatively small loan from the United States. Here I must stress the fact that Czechoslovakia is far richer than Poland, that it is among the richest, most industrialized countries in Eastern Europe, the second richest after East Germany. It is definitely a society which is capable of paying interest on its loans, and of repaying the principal of its loans. Despite this, the U.S. establishment, after consultations with its various bodies, including the CIA, decided to refuse the loan request. It concluded that Czechoslovakia, however stable it appeared, was inherently unstable because there were movements which challenged the existing order of things and which might succeed, given the amount of freedom they then enjoyed. The United States felt that this could lead to dissatisfaction, and ultimately to invasion. Your CIA was much better informed and

understood the nature of the movements better than the left-wing organizations in the West, and quite understandably advised the government not to grant the loan. Despite all the clamoring in your press about how great “a socialism with a human face” was, the American government made it very clear that they did not like what was happening there, that they did not want to help, and that they regarded it as doomed a long time before the Russians sent in any tanks. At the same time, a much higher loan was given to Rumania by the United States, which shows that they understood that the Rumanian type of challenge to the Soviet Union is compatible with the continuation of a stable society — where the Party controls the situation to such an extent that they can guarantee the safety of investment.

Mason: So we might say that beyond the inherent conservative character of bureaucratic structures in both the West and the East, there are also very specific stakes in Western support for the existing regimes in Eastern Europe. For example, something like 70 to 80 percent of Poland's exports go for servicing Poland's external debt, which is owed mainly to Western banks and international monetary institutions that are threatened by the possibility of a political collapse and a Polish default on its foreign obligations.

Kavan: Yes, that's precisely what I'm saying about the present Polish situation. The West needs stability. On the part of the establishment, I believe one is confronted with a very conscious unholy alliance between the two establishments who perceive an identical interest in preserving the status quo. This is the basis of their interpretation of world events, and leads to the division of the world into spheres of interest. Support from Western capitalist establishments for the opposition movements in the East is nonexistent, despite all the propaganda. Therefore, it seems to me that the more right-wing the government you elect here, as you did recently, the more likely it will be that they will unite with their partners on the other side to make the situation as difficult as possible for the Eastern oppositions, with the aim of eventually smashing that opposition. At the same time, both establishments would like to see the defeat of left-wing movements in the West. Many historical examples prove that the last thing the Soviet Union wants to see in the West is a period of instability, let alone the victory of some Western revolutionary movement.

Howard: Let's move from the unholy alliance to the holy alliance at

this point. Namely, let's ask the practical question of what we in the West can, in fact, do. What are the practical implications of all this for us, according to you?

Kavan: First of all, one has to start from the premise that there is very little information available in the West about the actual situation in the East, and, therefore, the first thing to do is to put pressure on your mass media to publish articles, opposition documents, and factual information coming from Eastern Europe in order to politicize people in the West. We must explain why what's happening in the East is relevant to them.

Howard: This is one of the functions of Palach Press, which you run.

Kavan: Yes, this is one of the many functions of Palach Press. We orient our work toward the bourgeois mass media, to whom we offer any kind of information they want without any kind of political reservation. At the same time, we are in touch with practically all opposition groups throughout the entire ideological spectrum, and we supply information from them to the mass media.

The other thing one can do is to draw conclusions from the information one receives and to express public solidarity with the movements in Eastern Europe. One can also translate that solidarity into practical help. One should fight the myth that exists among some groups on the Left that Eastern opposition groups do not have a political impact, that they don't serve as a first step towards a new society because many of the demands raised in Eastern Europe are couched in legalistic terms, in the classical terms of human rights.

Ideology is so divorced from the reality of Eastern Europe that it becomes itself a reality of a special kind with a great impact on the power structure. The legal code works the same way, so that if the *Charter '77* people use the legal code to show that the government is fulfilling its own laws by respecting their demands, it can have the same impact as the Polish trade union's direct attack on the Party's ideological claim to represent the working class. Therefore, even those leftist groups that believe that help should be given only to revolutionary forces should give help to Eastern human rights activists.

Help can come at two different levels. First of all, repressive actions should be publicized. For example, one of the *Charter '77* spokesmen is in prison and soon will be facing exile or a prison sentence of four to five years. You should expose the conditions

under which he is being held. You could send lawyers to the country, raise the demand for a free public trial, demand that conditions in prison correspond to the conditions laid down in the law, and so on.

At the same time, the main problem is not prison per se, although a number of people are in prison. The main weapon of repression used by the government is a threat to people's livelihoods. They resort to arrest only when that weapon, unemployment for political reasons, fails. Officially, Czechoslovakia abolished unemployment long ago, and therefore there is no form of unemployment benefits. If you are denied work for political reasons, you find yourself without any income whatsoever. If you are starving, the establishment simply tells you, "There's no need for you to starve in a socialist society because we have no unemployment." If you then recant your views, or apologize, you'll get a job the next day. But that particular weapon could be defeated if trade unions in the West were prepared to send money as an unemployment benefit, as a form of direct solidarity with those people who are under this kind of economic pressure. I can't think of anything which would be of greater practical help. One could also create jobs that people could perform without emigrating, so that the financial help could have a moral impact, and be something other than just charity. This would also deprive the government of another weapon it uses to threaten the people who are unemployed as a result of government action. If these people remain unemployed for more than three months, the government can say, "We will charge you under the law against social parasites and send you to prison for several years." That kind of catch-22 situation, consciously created by the government as a trap, can be broken by the kind of solidarity I've been talking about.

Howard: I thank you, Jan. You've told us a number of things we can do to make a holy alliance. Perhaps it's also true that you've given us some ideas to think about concerning our own societies.

POEMS

Anthony Sobin

**PHOTOGRAPH: HOME FOR THE AGED
STOWE, VERMONT—1931**

The men joke and whisper with the women
among the oaks and benches of the back garden
believing no one can hear them.

And in this photograph taken at dusk
their eyes are such a clear blue
it seems you can walk up the path
right into them

the blue spreading out all around you
like an azure sky in summer
alive with wasps and sunlight
and the ripe smell of yellow pears.

And suddenly it feels like you've been there before
as if you'd just stepped through the door
to some childhood home and in that instant
remembered everything—

the soft wood floors
the aquamarine light in the fruit jars
and the smell coming through the windows
of the orchard gardens

where the chrysanthemums are cut back
all summer long then bloom in November
and go on blooming until the last blossoms
sink beneath the rising snow like drowning men.

And even as you are thinking this
you hear the grains of snow
beginning to fall among the dried leaves.
The white crystals catch
in the bronze and yellow blossoms
and they do not melt.

The women look to the sky through their white hair
and bundle down into their collars.
The men take their arms and hurry them along

like so many shadows floating among indigo trees
rustling like a breeze over the fallen pears—
brown lumps dusted with new snow. All this

in a long New England evening
in a twilight
that lasts and lasts beyond all reason.

STUDY IN WHITE

The photographer is going all out
for a study in white.

He hopes for a silky, crowlike negative
with layers upon layers of black
spreading from edge to edge.

So for a setting
he has chosen an old farm kitchen
in a northern province
on a perfect winter day.

For background there are only
the plain whitewashed walls
and the cold snowlight
pouring into the room
through the tall icy windows.

The picture's single figure
central in the frame
is a French nun in white habit.

At the photographer's direction
she has removed with a razor
her long black eyebrows

and stands now at a scrubbed pine table
behind the four ivory colored eggs
he has placed there in the white light
that flows through the clear pitcher of milk
positioned just to her left.

From out of a linen sack
she has just withdrawn two great handfuls of flour
and these she holds out before her
filling the whole center of the frame.

At the moment the shutter snaps open
she is exploring the powder
with her lowered eyes
as if searching for the secret of bread.

The photographer is jubilant.

The negative in its wash
looks like a thin slice of coal

but as he holds it up to the window
the darkness between the nun's black hands
begins to burn with a thousand points of light
as if she were holding all the stars of a winter sky.

“Weevils,” he cries. “The flour! Full of weevils!”

And that’s hardly the worst.

There is a moon in that sky too
burning round and fierce above the stars.

The model posing as the nun
has left one of her dark brown eyes open
and light pours through it now
like a stream of milk.

George Bradley

AUBADE

Once in a great while, you might open your eyes
Into bright sunlight and think you are somewhere else.
Say Sardegna in '76, early one morning in Olbia—
The sun is red and huge, rising over the bay,
And the day is already warm; the town is weathered,
Worn to the colors of a pastel sketch, like the eyes
Of a man who has been drunk most of his life—
Bleached by the sun, or washed out by memory? There
Is no way of knowing, and of course you can never go back.
To speak the same words, to stand the same ground
Will not suffice, and the thought itself accomplishes
Nothing. All of it, Olbia, that sun, yourself one morning,
Is whirling away like the speed of light, and you
Are borne into a life irretrievably infused with a reality
Beyond recall, so that there is no telling how you arrived
In the sunshine, confused, waking as from dreams.

MONUMENT VALLEY

Maybe the mind works like centuries of erosion,
The runoffs and channels mostly bone-dry and then flooded
With a wall of water out of the desert, itself absorbed
Almost instantly into the cracked ground and leaving
Only a thin layer of fine sludge like a train of thought.
Over time the larger formations appear, personality
And prejudice, a manner of speaking, assuming all sorts
Of fantastic shapes, climbing into the atmosphere
And achieving a shimmering air of grandeur and intent.
Of course, much is washed away that these may remain,
And the landscape of youth is ravaged beneath us.
Whatever is extraneous, or delicate, or less than tenacious,
Has less chance than a lemming in the progress of ages,
Less chance than our own acts and inmost reflections
Stand in a lifetime of vanishing memories.
And we are left with monuments, resembling so much,
To soften the harsh light into shadows and their hues,
To make something like beauty out of such earth.

Martin Cloran

TROTSKY IN FLOWERS

Trotsky took the pickaxe in the garden.
How bougainvillea shocked him!
And red hibiscus, flaunting its stamen,
Forever shamelessly blooming. He hadn't seen
Winter for eleven years, but on hazeless
Days in the valley, snowy Popocatepetl

Reminded him, if his eyes rose,
Of another cold exile, of the masses
Rising, of a red army advancing on a white

Plain. The young girl in the house
Behind mine is singing "When The Saints
Come Marching In" in Spanish. The mounting
Music quickens her chore of sweeping
Petals from the porch. Already she glories
In her role as alto in the Pentecostal choir.
Mama plays percussion patting tortillas.
The necessary pigs and rooster listen to the light
Voice as it conjures the coming wonder of the second

Meal. Snapped from the stem, hibiscus
Wilts in the hand on the way to water;
Girls sing highly in other-worldly robes;
And Trotsky, mindful of white birches,
Prayed for one purge and execution too many
As the sun-filled axe flew down. Vision
Descended, revealed on its palms fresh wounds of fact.

Clayton Eshleman

VOLUNTARY PRAYER

A reopened carton of cream
whose encrusted top, left open a week
in refrigerator dark,
is the soul of a genuine nun
or the volcano held captive in the bell
of a water-spider. The deeper one goes,
the more truth seems horizontal,

and truth? A passerby
who suddenly turns, pressing a whole Münch
Karl Johan Street to my dining-room window,
with his eyes on stems growing
from the backs of sickly lions
their whole bodies gnawing to and fro in the heat-
intensified shade of a microscope
below which Nagasaki still undulates a molten
ripple in the American flag by the dust-
moteless school window below which
the carton-children stand at cream attention,
their encrusted blow-holes evoking a depth
that is purely and thickly white
until their corpuscles are led in,
fly-infested, mooing, Charlie Parker skeletons
milked for centuries by the rain —
And now that we are all assembled,
to whom will we turn for the key to address
the key-hole, for we do believe
the sky can be opened and what the poem cannot say
appear, we have faith that all that is visible
can be concentrated into one highly potent invisibility
made visible at the moment we cease to suffer,
and all these visibles, then, washed away,
which is to say that we have faith in the end of the world
in contrast to the end
of setting an end into our tears,
repetitive magpie in the saline branches
of our infancy parked like a tree
in the seamless meadow of never zippered to forever,
out of which not only Gertrude Stein is issuing
but mixed in with her repetitions the vital
carbuncles of our carburated lungs, black T-shirts
hanged from the sky line, the veil that invisible wears.

BOOKS

A SENSE OF DOOM

BADENHEIM 1939. By Aharon Appelfeld. David R. Godine. \$10.00.

There has been so much talk lately about language and structure and the deconstruction of the text, we tend to forget the simple fact that fiction has a subject. And as theories of interpretation flood the academic scene, it is also forgotten that important novels create a fictional world out of the more significant tragic forces and conflicts of the time. Such a novel is *Badenheim 1939*, by Aharon Appelfeld, an Israeli writer who survived World War II and the holocaust. Short, deceptively light, almost casual, verging on the satirical, the novel nevertheless has led me to rethink some of the things about fiction that I had taken for granted.

Despite the easy and staccato tempo of the narrative, as though it had been choreographed, like a dance, rather than written, its subject is large and grave, perhaps the largest and gravest of our time, and one that, because it is so grim, has been dealt with rarely in fiction. It is the weight of the *Badenheim* theme that forces one to reexamine the ideas about fiction that we have inherited from both the modernist and the avantgarde traditions. Appelfeld is not alone in this effect. A number of dissident writers from Russia and the satellite countries, such as Solzhenitsyn, Kundera, Zinoviev, Ivanov, to cite only a few of the outstanding figures, are distinguished by the fact that their themes are social, not literary; and though they are all masterful writers, the power of their fiction lies mainly in the urgency of their material. As against much current fiction in the West, these writers are concerned not so much with sexual or psychological mores or with the use of language, as with the struggle against the new forms of repression. To be sure, it is the tragic experience of the dissidents and of novelists like Appelfeld, who knew both fascism and communism, that makes for their difference from most Western writers. But the work of Naipaul, for example, whose sensibility was formed in the West, would indicate that the emphasis on individual consciousness is not the only choice of American and European writers.

In any event, the modernist heritage as well as that of the avantgarde has been to downgrade the importance of the subject and to elevate literary experiment and the depiction of states of mind. It is true that Mann, Kafka, Proust, even Joyce, were not without a subject. But they were more interested in social behavior than in social forces, and their treatment of society was largely in terms of the human condition. And even though most of the great moderns have been described as naturalists, theirs was a mythical version of naturalism, and the message of modernism, in painting as well as writing, has been contained in its emphasis on the properties of the medium.

To some extent, our view of the modernists has been colored by our wanting to distinguish between their monumental naturalism and the homespun realism of later fiction. As compared with the sexual, psychological, and physical banalities of existence that fill the popular novel today, the modernists would seem to be almost as pure as the symbolists, and as removed from actual experience. This, of course, is an extreme view. But it is the view that apparently inspired the reaction against conventional narrative by such writers as Barth and Pynchon. And it is the belief that modernism is still alive in the form of experimental, non-popular, seemingly subjectless fiction that is largely responsible for the novel that uses language to create atmosphere and a complex of meanings. For those who wanted to hold on to the ideology of modernism, this was an attractive position, despite the fact that much of the writing that grew out of it ignored the tragic concerns and terrible conflicts of contemporary life. Nor was one disposed to admit that most of it was boring.

There are of course notable exceptions, such as Marquez, Naipaul, Milosz, Mailer, Lessing, Bellow, Malamud, who are essentially, as Mary McCarthy put it, writers who deal with ideas, and are drawn to the large social and human issues of the time. But much of current fiction is either narrowly following the estheticism associated with modernism or it is comfortably engaged in what Gide called the horizontal portrayal of modern life. Writers like Irving and Updike, some of the black novelists, many of the feminists—all have this in common: in their different ways they are involved in the little disturbances of man. These disturbances usually have to do with sex or personal relations or social habits, and rarely with our major political conflicts. Suffering is thought of in personal terms and fate is conceived as a failure of self-realization.

In this respect, writers like Appelfeld and the Eastern dissidents have come out of a situation less favorable to living and more favorable to writing—except, of course, where rigid censorship throttles all independent work. Hence their fiction has less to do with the minutiae of living. For the terrors of the holocaust and communism have brought them to the abyss of contemporary experience. If, like Dostoyevsky, who saw the connection between pathology and politics, the dissidents have created a fiction at the junction of history and psychology, it has been because they have been part of a world where history and psychology meet.

Appelfeld's subject is nothing less than the holocaust. And if his treatment is somewhat oblique, almost allegorical, it is, I presume, because the holocaust is too big, too gruesome, too mindless, to lend itself easily to normal narrative procedures. Thus *Badenheim* is not an actual account of any recognizable element of the holocaust. What Appelfeld has captured in his semi-imaginary story of vacationers at a summer spa preparing for their shipment to the East on a cattle train is the peculiar combination of the political destiny and the unconsciousness of that destiny among German and Austrian Jews, particularly of the middle class. Indeed, it is a combination of awareness and lack of awareness characteristic of so many people and so many questions. It was in a vague way the state of mind of American Jews and, in fact, of American opinion at the time of the holocaust. And it is also the condition of our thinking about most critical problems today. Appelfeld catches it by never bringing in the holocaust—except by suggesting, but no more than suggesting, its terrors at the end of the novel—but by seizing its essence. Thus unconsciousness is rendered through the highly stylized frivolity and pettiness of the characters and what they do; while consciousness is conveyed by a haunting sense of doom, mostly atmospheric and metaphoric. For example, the East as destiny and destination is constantly referred to, sometimes grimly, but mostly as a new land, somewhere in Poland, full of hidden promise and unknown disappointments, particularly for the Polish Jews in *Badenheim* to whom the whole thing means going home again to end their lives. The effect is to create a mood of sadness and pity and helplessness, building slowly to the end, which comes suddenly and is unnerving, in the way events that are not directly experienced hit us.

Yet there are no political figures, no Nazis, no Jewish leaders among the central characters. Who are these people who by some miracle of the imagination convey the essence of the holocaust?—a

pompous historian, a few fading musicians, some frustrated women, a child prodigy, several simple-minded tradesmen, two aging, born-again prostitutes. Nothing serious happens or is talked about—which I take to be faintly representative of the emptiness of middle-class life, particularly at a summer resort. Nor does the ending, which has the bewildered vacationers crammed into the trains transporting them east, have any melodrama or false pathos—as does, for example, the slaughter of the Jews at Babi Yar at the close of *The White Hotel*, which is supposed to give sex a symbolic meaning and to redeem its pornographic treatment in the earlier sections of the novel.

It would be unfortunate if what might be called the new fiction with a humanist face were to sanction a return to social realism. But it does suggest that the novel of sensibility might be played out. And the new realism current in this country has too banal an idea of reality to fill the void.

It is an old story, but perhaps worth repeating, that advanced fiction often comes out of reactionary conditions, while progressive causes usually produce either uninteresting pedagogical writing, or wrap themselves in fashionable literary modes of the day.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS

FREUD INTO FICTION

THE WHITE HOTEL. By D.M. Thomas. Viking. \$13.95.

The White Hotel is a clever, crossword-puzzle sort of novel which promises a good deal more than it delivers. A rumination on Freud's life-urge, death-urge theory from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, it uses the figure of Lisa Erdman, a fictional patient of the good doctor's, to explore that idea. The formal construction of the book is daring—seven separate sections, of contrasting modes, which come at the story from different angles, creating the effect of the author circling in on his subject in a spiral. In this way the structure echoes the process of psychoanalysis.

The prologue consists of fabricated letters of Freud, Ferenczi, and Sachs—not so much correspondences (the first is dated 1909, the last 1931) as devices to set a tone, place the story in time, and introduce Lisa as a “case.” A chatty tone prevails, and there are a number of cute inside references. (Thomas’s Freud writes: “Abraham promises a paper on the female castration complex. Doubtless he will wield a very blunt knife. Still, he is sound and decent. Ferenczi will be trying to justify his new-found enthusiasm for kissing his patients.”)

Section one is a long dream poem written by Lisa, for Freud, mixing images of sex and death at a white hotel in rhyming and off-rhyming lines. Fat pricks, running juices, and fingers up rectums against “charred bodies hung from trees.” The language of the poetry is sufficiently arresting, and the poetry itself is good enough on the surface to hold the reader’s interest, even though the reader does not, indeed cannot at this point in the book, make much sense of it. Thomas puts it forward as a puzzle, with the unspoken promise that all will become clear in due course.

It is hard to believe Lisa as the author, however, when we later learn something about her. There is nothing in her background to suggest that she could manage rhyme with such remarkable sophistication. (Thomas himself is, of course, a poet and translator of poets.) As well, the erotic fantasies have a distinctly masculine tone. “hand jammed up to the wrist inside me, laced in skin” or “that night he almost burst my cunt apart” or, most particularly, “I leaned upon the rail, he came behind / and rammed up into me, he got so far / up into me, my still half-wintery heart / burst into sudden flower, I couldn’t tell / which hole it was. . . .” Not knowing which hole it was seems more believably a masculine confusion.

The next section—The Gastein Journal—is a prose amplification of the poem, also written by Lisa, dealing with the same train ride, hotel, people, etc. Eros interweaves with Thanatos, time collapses, reality distorts, and the dream mood is maintained. The writing is careful, vivid, and occasionally elegant, and the mood more successfully dreamlike than any other attempt this reader can remember. Nevertheless, the material is a bit of a tease, simply flowing by, as dreams do, suggesting connections rather than making them. Once again the reader is asked to wait.

One has read almost a hundred pages on faith when Thomas appears to relent and gives us Freud’s case history of Lisa. “In the autumn of 1919 I was asked by a doctor of my acquaintance to

examine a young lady who had been suffering for the past four years from severe pains in her left breast and pelvic region. . . ,” it begins, promising no nonsense, and one settles down to watch the Viennese master pull things together, anticipating the sort of pleasure one gets from Sherlock Holmes, at the very least. Initial enthusiasm at Thomas’s daring ploy—to write like Freud!—fades rather rapidly since he cannot write anywhere near as well. (He can manage a pastiche of Freud doing an informal letter, but Freud writing a case history is another matter.) More often than not, Thomas’s character does not even think like Freud.

Almost immediately a small off-note is sounded, the first of many errors of varying degrees of seriousness whose aggregate effect is to destroy the illusion that it is Freud who writes. In his description of the first interview with Lisa, Thomas’s Freud writes, “She was extremely thin, even by the standards of that unhappy year, when few in Vienna had enough to eat. I suspected an anorexia nervosa, on top of her other troubles.” A small point, but significant. Freud was scrupulous in the extreme about such matters. Anorexia nervosa involves amenorrhea, a faulty perception of the body image, and an intense fear of gaining weight, and none of these were present in Lisa. He would not have been slapdash in his diagnoses, nor in his suspicions. In addition, although the real Freud used the term anorexia (a condition) many times, he does not appear to have used the term anorexia nervosa (a syndrome, and thus quite different). The term was first proposed in 1874 by Sir William Gull, but it was not in general use in 1919, and has only recently resurfaced. Freud does not seem to have been aware of Sir Gull, of the term, or indeed, of the syndrome as we now understand it. His tendency, when he ran across anorexia, was to relate it to the patient’s individual history. No syndrome, but infinite different anorexias. (His example of the continuously vomiting girl comes to mind, whose anorexia he traced to her ambivalent desire both to be pregnant (morning sickness) and to avoid intercourse (stay thin to the point of ugliness).)

Nor is the false Freud’s analysis of the patient and her writings convincing to anyone familiar with the real Freud’s work. There is a sense almost of playfulness as Thomas moves around the bits and pieces in a relaxed mood which seems wrong. Thomas understands the associative, nonlinear style of psychoanalytic puzzle-solving, and he is clever with dreams, but it is not enough. Several things are wrong with the case history. It is altogether too loquacious (a story

over port in the evening at one's club) and misses the rigor of Freud's actual reports. It does not give the reader the pay-off he has been waiting for. Freud resembles a sort of upgraded Dr. Watson, pushing along good naturedly, making no more than predictable insights. Once again Thomas asks us to wait, since the puzzle is not solved, and since, as it turns out, much of what Lisa tells the doctor is lies. We learn this later, and never know sufficient truth about her to approach the problem of analyzing her fantasies, even in retrospect, with any confidence. Thomas defers and defers, and at the end distracts our attention, hoping we will have forgotten how much he promised to tell us, how much, in truth, he owes us. It strains credulity that Lisa would lie to him as much as she does, resistance notwithstanding, or that she would leave so much out in the recitation of her history. She has no real motive for this, psychoanalytically speaking, and Thomas simply makes her do it, for structural reasons, so as to surprise the reader towards the end when yet another version emerges. The whole section is a gloss—nicely written, but intellectually superficial, self-consciously clever, and awkwardly poised between parody and reverence.

Conventional narrative begins about halfway through the book with scenes of Lisa, symptoms more or less abated, as a second level opera singer interacting with colleagues, friends, and family. For this reader, at least, she remains a cipher. Thomas tells us all sorts of things, but he fails to dramatize, and we remain outside the story. We do not connect with gay Vienna, luxury hotels, or the joys of making music, we simply take Thomas's word for it all and continue to read, still searching for a way to bring the book together.

Towards the end we realize we've been had. Lisa is at Kiev with an adopted son, and they are killed at Babi Yar. The book, which had deferred so much, changes the terms of the contract. Babi Yar is a non sequitur, part of a game the author is playing, and the work the reader has done on Lisa has been a trick. Thomas never knew any more about her than the reader, that is to say very little, and one dismally concludes she will never ramify. She was never really there. Of Babi Yar, Thomas writes:

"The soul of man is a far country, which cannot be approached or explored."*

*An unattributed quote of Heraclitus, which Thomas may well have run across on page 209 of Jones' *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*. Jones explains that these are the words of Heraclitus. Thomas does not.

Which seems to remove the premise of the book. The author had encouraged us to believe, for two hundred and fifty pages, that it was an attempt, towards which we might safely invest our best energies, to approach and explore the soul of Lisa. He goes on:

Most of the dead were poor and illiterate. But every single one of them had dreamed dreams, seen visions, and had amazing experiences, even the babes in arms (perhaps especially the babes in arms). Though most of them had never lived outside the Podol slum, their lives and histories were as rich and complex as Lisa Erdman-Berenstein's. If a Sigmund Freud had been listening and taking notes from the time of Adam, he would still not fully have explored even a single group, even a single person.

The reader may not share Thomas's conviction that Lisa's life and history is "rich and complex." Raskalnikov is rich and complex, Julian Sorel is rich and complex—Lisa is a device. To say that the paragraph is anticlimactic is not to say enough—it is puerile, and offensive. Who is it who needs to be reminded that the lives of the Podol Jews killed at Babi Yar were valuable? Who is it who needs to relate them to a neurotic opera singer of a higher economic class to discern that value? For whom is the horror increased by the idea that Freud might have found them interesting subjects for study?

As if to tie the themes of sex and death together, Thomas has Lisa die with a bayonet up her vagina. Like others before him, Thomas uses images of the holocaust in a desperate attempt at epiphany. In a section that fairly drips with false sympathy for mankind, Thomas grinds the knife in the cunt and hopes for a thematic synthesis. His subsequent escape into mysticism is so fast as to appear furtive.

Lisa's symptoms of 1919, the pains in the left breast and pelvis, are finally understood as a somatic precognition of her experiences in the ravine at Babi Yar when an SS man sends his jackboot crashing into her left breast, and then again into her pelvis ("the clean snap of the bone"). A provocative idea, precognition, but the implications here are unfortunate. Her symptoms, then, were clearly beyond Freud's purview. So much for his analysis. By extension, the holocaust is understood as something fated, inevitable, an inescapable kink in the playing out of the great cosmic scheme. The stoicism is too easy. Repugnant, even.

The last section seems to be an extended fantasy of Lisa's while she dies. Or perhaps she is dead, and this is after. The reader, in any

case, is probably too angry to care what the narrative mode is at this point. Thomas has played so many games, so fast and loose, that one assumes he doesn't care how we read it. As he bails out of this covert, self-indulgent novel, it is every man for himself. Lisa goes to Israel (seen here as a redemptive paradise), works things out with mother and father, opens up to love and eros, etc. Death is seen as the other side of a successful psychoanalysis. The suggestion seems to be that the death urge only appears to be ominous (as if Freud needn't have been so alarmed) and is actually no more than a precognitive urge to move on to the next stage of existence, which is redemptive, and better than life.

The kindest reader may wonder, at the end, if such elaborate peregrinations were necessary to reach this particular destination. The back-to-front construction of the book is a brave and intrinsically fascinating idea, but it puts a great deal of pressure on the ending. Some books can sustain a weak ending, but *The White Hotel* cannot. The various sections of this book are like elaborate, highly decorated checks for vast amounts, and the end is like a trip to the bank, where one discovers, sadly, that they can't be cashed.

FRANK CONROY

BLACKMUR AND ADAMS

HENRY ADAMS. By R.P. Blackmur. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. \$19.95.

The projective recognitions of critics are well known—and may be an honorable way of meeting literature. For R.P. Blackmur, Henry Adams was the writer that seems to walk out of the past to be recognized as one's self. Though they were both New Englanders, their worlds and their times were different; after all, Blackmur was only a boy of fifteen when Adams died at the age of eighty in 1919. Yet there was a temperamental affinity between them, and they shared a sense of surviving on the margin. Deliberate marginality

was as much the choice of the grandson and great-grandson of presidents—historian, novelist, autobiographer, and “stable-companion to statesmen”—as it was that of the eccentric critic-poet-educator who was always an outsider in the academy. But both felt a still more profound disconnection, too. For both there was an unwillingness to assent to ideas of cosmic unity, a suspicion that man in general had no “place” in a universe without plan or meaning.

Blackmur also seems to have thought he heard—perhaps because he desired to utter it himself—a Carlylean Yea amidst Adams’s Everlasting Nays. Adams was one of those, he thought, who come back from crises of nerve or faith with “tokens”—their writings—which represent “the impossible, whatever that is, to which, in some part of us, we fatally shape ourselves.” Represent it however, not as an actuality, but “as a haunting echo.” Blackmur added, “When we come on the lives or works of such men, they have the peculiar warrant of something we have experienced before, less perfectly but more deeply; they have the persuasiveness, the inevitable mistakenness, and the uncontrollableness of sharp memory. The tokens have values in the actual world which we had not known we felt, but the tokens have other values, too, which may belie the actual and the reasonable and the desirable—values which are precise without being recognizable—and these are the values created between the withdrawal and the return: we feel their pressure quickening the actual without knowing what they are. And then—whether we are these men themselves or merely those who rehearse ourselves in the works of others—then we cannot help mutilating, trapping, imprisoning this direct central experience in the conventions of the mind for the sake of ordinary safety.”

The passage just quoted (a characteristic specimen of Blackmur’s elliptical style) was written as part of a projected book on Adams which was left unfinished at Blackmur’s death in 1965. He had contemplated for many years a full study treating of Adams’s life as well as his achievements as historian and historiographer, the literary monuments *Mont Saint-Michel and Chartres* and the *Education*, and the two novels, *Democracy* and *Esther*. But in the mass of notes and manuscript now in the Princeton Library, editor Veronica Makowsky has been able to discover only one unit sufficiently complete and of a standard comparable to the critic’s best work. This, a continuous reading of the *Education* with an interpolated section on *Chartres*, occupies the bulk of a new volume that gives some idea of how Blackmur had planned to go beyond the handful of articles on

Adams he had published during his lifetime. It also contains the most famous of these, "The Expense of Greatness" (1936), already reprinted several times. In that essay, Blackmur had advanced the idea that Adams's attempt to find faith and unity, though it led to a confession of ignorance and failure, was somehow also a testament which was "as near the actual representation of unity as the individual mind can come." Adams, "like Spinoza," he said, "was god-intoxicated, like Pascal god-ridden." Blackmur seems to have continued to feel that Adam's admiration of the culture of the twelfth century, which had found centrality in the worship of the Virgin of Chartres, was part of a many-times-repeated effort to "return" to the convictions of religion.

It is easy to see how Blackmur himself, writing in the forties and fifties of this century, felt a neoconservative nostalgia for lost religious and lost social faiths, and found the "echo" of them in Adams. But Adams's mind, I believe, was less nostalgic than ironic in his evocation of the past. Yes, he knew himself to be a "failure," as the *Education* repeatedly says. Unlike his ancestors, who had only been handicapped by scruple and material circumstances from full identification with society's total aims, Adams had withdrawn from a social mass he considered anarchic. He judged his education to have been a failure, and his *Education* a failed work which he had printed for a few friends who were invited to emend. Above all, he had "failed" to find unity—or intention—in the universe at large. But the failure was really society's and Nature's for being, at last, perceived as formless and directionless, as inadequate to meet the human dream of meaning. Adams's mind, I think, was more truly contemporary than Blackmur allowed himself to perceive. I find him agonized not so much by the nineteenth century anguish of loss of faith as by the modern existentialist dilemma which takes one a further step: if the center is lost and cannot be recovered, what then?

Adams's third-person autobiography asserts an existential surrender of the "I" as well as of divine presence. His preface rejects the example of Rousseau who, in his *Confessions*, "erected a monument of warning against the ego" and speaks instead of a "manikin" about whom "the toilet of education was to be draped." These clothes of personal existence do not disguise an essential Carlylean self whom we can hope to discover, but a hollow lay figure which means nothing without its clothes, without behavior, experience. "Tu n'es rien d'autre que ta vie," it is said in *Huis Clos*. If Adams's life is to be read as containing an essence of aspiration more significant than his

life, it can be only because one insists upon Garcin's plea, in Sartre's play—"on est ce qu'on veut." But it is not clear that Adams really wanted to be other than what he was or to believe in what his intelligence denied.

Adams's attitude towards the cosmos and towards history was as deconstructive as his attitude towards consciousness, and his efforts to suggest form in general may be seen as ironic. *Chartres*, which he thought of subtitling "A Study in Thirteenth Century Unity," intended to balance the *Education*, "A Study in Twentieth Century Multiplicity," is often understood as Adams's tribute to a viewpoint of coherence. But it can be seen as a way of describing what is only hypothetical, the creation of the human imagination. His appreciation of the unitary vision only intensified his conviction that the achievement was essentially esthetic. He regretted, in a way, that modern man had become incapable of such performance: "The worst of it is that we have no imaginative race left to reconstruct a faith or an art," he wrote his brother Brooks. But he did not stop regarding the faith and the art as equivalent actions of the mind.

Blackmur recounts, in the present volume, the story of Adams's late interest in medieval architecture, stained glass, and even in the music of the medieval *chansons*. His interest in the music had been aroused by a passage in his grandfather's diary. John Quincy Adams, defeated for reelection as President, had gone to see the French opera, *Richard Coeur-de-Lion* by Grétry, and been forcibly struck by the aria of the minstrel who sings to the King, "O, Richard! O, mon Roi!/L'univers t'abandonne." Blackmur is chiefly interested in tracing Adams's impulse to go back to the original Richard and his times and songs, but, clearly, Adams had been moved by his grandfather's emotion because it expressed an exclusion from politics which in his own case had become absolute. More important still, the words of the song reflected his personal redefinition of the usual idea of failure. The idea certainly occurred to Adams that the *universe* had failed to meet his longing for form. For Adams, facing the twentieth century, God was dead, and the Virgin, if one had to continue to imagine her, was to be imagined looking down "from a deserted heaven into an empty church, on a dead faith."

Adams says in the *Education* that "from cradle to grave the problem of running order through chaos, direction through space, discipline through freedom, unity through multiplicity, has always been and must always be the task of education as it is the moral of

religion, philosophy, science, art, politics, and economy.” Yet it is an undertaking foredoomed, he shows. His complete realization of the “indifference of Nature,” as one puts it, must have arrived well before the shocking and meaningless suicide of his wife, an event which he could not bear to mention in conversation afterwards and which he left out—along with the preceding twenty years that included his marriage—from the *Autobiography*. His brilliant sister Louisa’s death of tetanus in Italy in 1870 brought on, Adams wrote, his “first serious consciousness of Nature’s gesture—her attitude towards life—took form then as a phantasm, a nightmare, an insanity of force...the human mind felt itself stripped naked, vibrating in a void of shapeless energies, with resistless mass, colliding, rushing, wasting, and destroying what these same energies had created and labored from eternity to perfect. Society became fantastic, a vision of pantomime with a mechanical motion, and its so-called thought merged in the mere sense of life, and pleasure in the sense.” Reviewing this passage and the description by Adams of the event that provoked it, Blackmur insists: “There is a unity asserted here...the unity of feeling by which one copes with the under, unrationalizable half of the world; the feeling into which creeps the vital but not quite acknowledgeable notion that true reason is only an awkward and limited sense, like the others.... The unity was in the response, as always, and by convention: the convention by which revolt becomes restoration and refreshment of mind.” This is not the clearest kind of writing, and Blackmur has pushed his quest for some positive behind Adams’s negatives to a point that is, at any rate, invisible to me. Adams, in recounting how he soon afterwards saw Mont Blanc for the first time, says that it “looked to him for what it was—a chaos of anarchic and purposeless forces” which “he needed days of repose to see... clothe itself again with the illusions of his sense, the white purity of its shows, the splendor of its light and the infinity of its heavenly peace.” Blackmur takes this as the expression of Adams’s habit of “return” to the feeling of unity—though it can only be read properly, I think, as the darkest humor, a comment on the necessary function of such an illusion.

Blackmur’s review of the *Education* often shows a tendency to such deflections which direct reference to Adams’s own text corrects. He was right to consider Adams a poet whose program was one of symbolic action (in Kenneth Burke’s sense) against the forces that act upon him. We do live, as Blackmur says, in an age when conventional slogans or formulas take the place of traditional symbols

resonant with accumulated power over “the occult, the mysterious, the unknowable.” But Blackmur sometimes sounds as though he thinks that Adams aimed, by his own symbolic language, to recover some portion of that power for the modern age, including the power to imply, to validate, the supernatural. He takes too literally Adams’s declaration that both the Virgin and the Dynamo represent “occult” forces when what Adams means is that they both represent what cannot be translated into the language of direct experience yet is held to be true. The direction of religious emotion and the control of physical power equally, of course, account for the nature of civilizations. We must remember the objective historian in Adams. Comte, as Adams himself described, got him early, and his skepticism never really left him. Darwinism certainly did its usual job on his inherited ideas of inherent order, though he tended to be skeptical of *all* systems which stitch together a cosmos of contingency. Indeed, Darwinism itself struck him as having merely provided, in the place of the Maker, “a safe, conservative, practical, thoroughly commonlaw deity,” and Adams appears the ultimate deconstructionist, recognizing all systems as games of the mind: “Henry Adams was the first in an infinite series to admit to himself that he really did not care whether truth was or was not true. He did not even care that it should be proved true, unless the process was new and amusing. He was a Darwinian for fun.”

Although he came before relativity and the uncertainty principle, Adams suspected that science would eventually confirm his suspicion of universal disorder. He seized upon the statement of Karl Pearson that “order and reason, beauty and benevolence, are characteristics and conceptions which we find solely associated with the mind of man,” and that “chaos is all that science can logically assert of the supersensuous.” The kinetic theory of gas is “an assertion of ultimate chaos,” Adams concluded, and then generalized, “Chaos was the law of nature; Order was the dream of man.” Blackmur sees this acceptance of the death of metaphysics, however, as a sign, somehow, that Adams felt that metaphysics was more necessary, that the mind of man “would always try to know the unknowable, and ‘would be forced to enter supersensual chaos’ from which Pearson meant to exclude him”—a conclusion I do not find justified by Adams’s own pages.

Skepticism lies behind Adams’s half-serious attempt to create a theory of history. He did not so much hope to run order through

chaos, in the end, as to create “a spool on which to wind the thread of history without breaking it.” He warned that the historian must not try “to know what is truth, if he values his honesty The laws of history only repeat the lines of force or thought.” Man’s idea of himself and his world was secreted from the mind, like the oyster’s pearl—the simile is Adams’s own—and man “knew it was true because he made it” and was even ready to wage wars for the “unity” he had created. Adams does not seem to me to have intended more than a descriptive convenience in his application of scientific laws about mass or motion or chemical change—themselves examples of the oyster’s faculty—to social change. The second law of thermodynamics appealed to him because it confirmed his conviction that nature’s propensity was towards disorder.

Blackmur’s discussion of Adams’s historical theories is incomplete; his manuscript breaks off before treating the last two chapters of the *Education*. He does observe that Adams’s “A Letter to American Teachers of History” and “The Rule of Phase Applied to History” are governed by a curious playfulness of mind: “Adams plays with his dynamic theory as if it were fact, and in this play shows that combination of frivolity and seriousness which the man of the world and the stoic both think go best with surrender to the inevitable.” And yet Blackmur calls his unfinished last chapter dealing with Adams’s historical theory, “The Full Return.” I cannot help believing that it was with tongue in cheek that he called upon the historian to keep faith with the “imaginary ideals” of unity, and in the power of thought, “ultimate, independent, self-producing, self-sustaining, incorruptible solvent of all earlier lower energies, incapable of degradation or dissolution”—human thought which alone sustains the notion of unity and meaning in all things.

Blackmur wrote that Adams was “one of those who know the horror where belief ends,” adding, “it is only through them that we know what it is to believe, and love, and must needs believe again.” That process of return cannot, I think, have been Adams’s own, and it was only momentarily Blackmur’s experience, I suspect. Why he never finished his book about Adams, he might not himself have been able to say—though Denis Donoghue, who writes a foreword, suggests that “Blackmur’s mind worked best in the essay of twenty or twenty-five pages.” One may guess that the undertaking was, for Blackmur, an autobiographical one, an effort so intimate and difficult that it could find no final issue that fitted into the conven-

tional bio-critical frame. What he did leave is a fascinating paraphrase in which it is sometimes difficult to distinguish critic from subject. he may, in the process, have been unable to keep from “mutilating, trapping, imprisoning” Adams’s own thought.

MILLICENT BELL

LIFE IN GULAG

KOLYMA TALES. Varlam Shalamov, tr. from the Russian by John Glad. W.W. Norton & Co. \$9.95.

Two slender volumes of rather pale poems by Varlam Shalamov appeared in the Soviet Union in 1964 and 1972. They were in effect sketches of the extreme north, with its short summers, its permafrost, its dwarf cedars, its primary colors. But there were enough hints that the author had experienced an involuntary sojourn in those regions for Solzhenitsyn to recognize him “as a brother.” In the late sixties some short stories under his name began to appear abroad, first in German and then in French translation, followed by the publication in Russian emigré journals between 1966 and 1970. Little was known about the author who remained in the Soviet Union and repudiated the authorship of the stories. He was born in 1907, was arrested at the age of 22, and spent close to 17 years in the labor camp at Kolyma, the area in the far Siberian north where gold was mined by forced labor during Stalin’s regime. In *Hope Against Hope* Nadezhda Mandelstam mentions Shalamov’s story about an unnamed poet dying in a northern transit camp, and in her second book of memoirs she records that Shalamov was offended when she confided to him that her first visual grasp of labor camp life came from Solzhenitsyn: Shalamov felt that by comparison with Kolyma, Solzhenitsyn’s camp experience was quite easy. (Solzhenitsyn himself states in the *Gulag Archipelago* that he wanted Shalamov to be a co-author of his book, but Shalamov declined.)

In 1978 The Overseas Publication Interchange in London brought out a volume of Shalamov’s stories in Russian, its 895 pages

containing 105 stories, with a flyleaf injunction that "this Samizdat collection is published without the author's knowledge and consent." The experience the stories convey leaves Solzhenitsyn far behind. Besides being an important link in the vast prison literature harking back to Dostoyevsky, the stories are bound to stand on their own as a major social document. Technically they can be described as Chekhovian, plunging the reader into an immediate situation, introducing the characters with a few brief strokes, and ending with a sharp twist. But the experience is so condensed and palpable, and the force of each deadpan ending is so great that it feels like a severe blow. Reading the whole book through is an endurance test. You learn in passing that it is forty-five below zero when the spit freezes in mid-air, that the lice begin to move on your skin when you enter a heated room, that it is impossible to avert one's gaze from a person who has a piece of bread in his mouth, that the same frost that transforms the spit also penetrates the soul.

A mercifully short selection of these stories has just been translated by John Glad. His translations are accurate and forceful, and the foreword supplies some useful information and observations. He selected for his translation 22 stories which he "literally felt compelled to see appear," and grouped them under the headings of "Survival," "Hope," "Defiance," "The Criminal World," and "The Jailors' World." This arrangement is in itself an imaginative contribution by John Glad: it helps the reader organize his experience of the stories to find, within the horror, the redeeming grace that compels one to go on reading, and to establish the borderline between the utter inhumanity of the criminal world and the human decency which miraculously survives. The choice of a story to open his selection is characteristic of John Glad's creative approach. "Of all the northern trees I loved the dwarf cedar most of all." This statement opens a page of lyrical description preceding a grim story. So it happens that the eternity of nature, the silence of the taiga, and the image of the valiant northern tree, the symbol of endurance and recuperation, come alive in the reader's imagination at the outset and linger in his mind when the book is closed.

ELENA LEVIN

THE OLD FRONTIER

COMPANY. By Samuel Beckett. Grove. \$8.95

CITIES OF THE RED NIGHT. By William S. Burroughs. Holt. \$14.95.

Now that we have known Samuel Beckett and William S. Burroughs for over two decades apiece, we can associate with each the radical literary development of a single esthetic idea; and the idea identified with each of them has the common quality of previous acceptance in the visual arts. For Beckett, the key idea was lessness or, to be precise, lessness as moreness or, to be more precise, the possibilities of moreness with lessness; for it has been his aim to create not rhetorical splendor (in emulation of his immediate mentor James Joyce) but a language so spare it would render silence resonant.

The quiet of his early plays is universally familiar; his later plays are yet more spare, often consisting of monologues punctuated by silences. There has been a parallel, if less familiar, evolution in his fiction—away from repetitious, limited vocabulary (which now curiously seems more Steinian than Joycean) to such run-on sentences as these from *Comment c'est* (1961):

in me that were without when the panting stops scraps of an
ancient voice in me not mine

To me, one root of Beckett's success is that he is nearly always at once abstract and yet very concrete.

His latest prose work, *Company*, is likewise filled with images of pointlessness (and thus, by interpretative extension, of meaninglessness), but is structured not as punctuationless fragments but as a series of prose vignettes, each a single paragraph in length. Here is a characteristic beginning:

If the voice is not speaking to him it must be speaking to another.
So with what reason remains he reasons. To another of that
other. Or of him. Or of another still. To another of that order or
of him or of another still. To one of his back in the dark in any
case. Of one on his back in the dark whether the same or another.
So with what reason remains he reasons and reasons ill.

Some of the paragraphs have autobiographical overtones that are really beside the point (except to certain scholars), while others inti-

mate a “philosophy” that is no more than modernist platitudes (making “critical” interpretations of it compendia of clichés). What distinguishes Beckett—what gives him a secure place in literary history—is his innovative style, which is largely an exploration of the possibilities of linguistic lessness. Nobody wrote like this before him, while everyone who has done so since invariably echoes him.

William Burroughs’s innovation was collage—the taking of materials that were not initially created in sequence and did not inherently belong in sequence and then splicing them together not only to make them comment on each other but also to create a quality of awesome leaps in time and space. Onto this style he grafted a vision obsessed by degradation and, at times, by redemption from degradation (an element that I find less attractive than his style). *Naked Lunch* (1958) is the great book that established Burroughs’s literary reputation, and it remains a great book, full of both particular passages and a general quality that stick in one’s head. However, it seems to me that collage has since become a terribly hackneyed form, a familiar staple in every art today; and perhaps the surest test of this generalization is that I can think of no distinguished work, *in any art*, that is syntactically based on collage. (Rauschenberg’s major assemblages, we remember, preceded 1958, while Karlheinz Stockhausen’s awful *Hymnen*, to cite one example among many collages, was composed well after then.)

Burroughs’s new book is billed by its publisher as a “*magnum opus*, perhaps even more important than *Naked Lunch*,” which he knows as well as everyone else remains Burroughs’s milestone. For this new work Burroughs recycles extraordinary characters who appeared in his earlier books, such as Dr. Benway; but he exploits our memory of them, rather than adding to our sense of their specialness. He also exploits a prurient interest in homoerotic-pharmatopia—a subject that has made him a favorite contemporary writer for some who have no other favorites. Remembering a 1966 interview in which Burroughs declared he was “quite deliberately addressing myself to that whole area of what we call dreams,” it is easy for us to read *Cities of the Red Night* as a succession of transcribed fantasies. However, whereas *Naked Lunch* was an horrific journey, as difficult in style as in content, this is an accessible travelogue, written mostly in a cornball pulp-novel style that verges on becoming parody, not only of its familiar sources but, alas, of itself.

Nonetheless, glimmers of his earlier genius occasionally appear, usually in his hyperboles and in descriptions of young men:

Shortly thereafter a boat was lowered and it rowed toward us. Standing in the stern was a slim blond youth, his gold-braided coat glittering in the sun. Beside him was a youth in short gray pants and a shirt with a red scarf around his neck. The boat was rowed by what appeared to be a crew of women, singing as they rowed and turning toward us to leer and wink with their painted faces.

The “women” turn out to be “handsome youths in women’s garb”—a dreamy homoerotic surprise that might be more of a surprise to some Burroughs readers than to others. This book is a series of episodes that are neither linear nor collage—in essence, a structure similar to a *New Yorker* feature piece—and as a whole suffers from a desultory quality that suggests that it was edited either too much or not enough.

Of all the books that Burroughs has written since *Naked Lunch*, the most extraordinary, to my mind, is *The Third Mind* (1978), which is a collection of dry interviews/explanations and audacious experiments done mostly in collaboration with, or under the influence of, Brion Gysin, the book’s ostensible co-author. It includes samples of his cut-up writing (which is not collage, where the parts are chosen to affect each other, but systematic, yet aleatoric mixes of words from different domains). Here Burroughs is broaching a literary territory that has scarcely been explored; but it is others, not he, who presently stand at the frontier. I should add that, though likewise a libertarian, I have trouble with Burroughs’s politics, which appears to base our common social philosophy not on sexual freedom or on free drugs—two good places to start—but on the right of everyone to a gun of his choice.

Samuel Beckett and William S. Burroughs are contemporary masters—not guys who have pounded the beat for a lifetime, but the authors of undisputed masterpieces. Lessness and collage were true innovations for literature twenty years ago, but by now they are milestones that, in turn, any avant-garde that is worthy of that name must decisively surpass.

RICHARD KOSTELANETZ

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